



What Happens If I'm Exposed to a COVID-19 Positive Individual? What Is the Public Health Response?

One of the most common questions about the COVID-19 pandemic is from people who want to know what happens when someone tests positive for the virus, and whether it's possible they could have unknowingly been exposed as well.

Fortunately, Waukesha County Public Health has a proactive team of Public Health nurses trained in the process to track down and notify people about these cases. This process is called **contact tracing**, and here's how it works:

- When a healthcare provider calls Public Health to report a confirmed case of COVID-19, or when Public Health receives a lab result, a PH nurse calls the individual to inform them of their positive test results. Often this is the first time the individual learns their test result. The nurse tells them to isolate, provides education on the disease & answers questions.
- The nurse next conducts an extensive interview with the individual. This helps identify the potential source of infection, collects information on the severity of the illness, and identifies people who have had close contact -- defined as someone they have been less than 6 feet away from for 10+ minutes, while infectious.
- These individuals identified by the COVID-19 positive person as being exposed are contacted by Public Health to notify them of the exposure. They are educated on the need to stay quarantined for 14 days since the date of their last exposure and to monitor themselves for symptoms.
- If any exposures occurred at a business, the owner or HR is notified by Public Health. The business is asked to help identify any potential exposures and send Public Health the names of people who were exposed. Public Health then calls all the people exposed at the business and instructs them on the need to quarantine and monitor for symptoms.

As of April 15, Public Health has investigated more than 2,700 suspected cases. The trend has been that approximately 9% of the suspect cases becomes confirmed cases.

The **contact tracing** process applies to all confirmed COVID-19 cases in Waukesha County, including any cases that may have had close contact with our facilities and staff.

[Click to read this excellent report on how contact tracing can help re-open the country](#)