

## What is contact tracing?

Contact tracing is when health services identify who has been in close contact with someone who has an infection to see who may be at risk of catching it. In the case of coronavirus, it is about:

- Identifying who someone diagnosed with COVID-19 has been in contact with;
- Identifying the extent of that contact;
- Establishing if that person is at risk of catching the virus themselves, and providing them with advice;
- Engaging in active follow up and referring close contacts for testing.

## What is a contact tracing centre?

A contact tracing centre (CTC) is the place where people, who have been trained, contact people with COVID-19, and subsequently their close contacts, to provide advice to help stop further spread of the virus. A web based IT system, called CovidCare Tracker, is used to track and manage the calls.

## Where are the contact tracing centres located?

There were a number of CTCs established across the country, at Universities, Government Offices and Statutory Agencies, including:

- Curragh Defence Forces Camp\*
- Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) (Dublin/ Cork)\*
- Limerick (HSE, Revenue, UL)\*
- Galway (National University of Ireland Galway, Mayo Institute of Technology and Merlin Park University Hospital)\*\*
- Revenue (Dublin)\*\*
- Trinity College Dublin\*
- University College Cork\*
- University College Dublin\*
- Dublin City University\*

\*All CTCs were in operation from March 2020 to Friday the 12<sup>th</sup> June 2020.

\*\*In response to the downward trend week on week, two CTCs continue in operation from Saturday the 13<sup>th</sup> June 2020.

The HSE is also using a virtual approach, with experienced HSE staff working in virtual contact tracing groups remotely. This group links in with a coordinator who manages rotas and provides oversight and support.

## What do the contact tracing centres do?

A member of the call team working at the CTC telephones the person who is a confirmed case of COVID-19 to inform the person about contact tracing, and subsequently finds out who they have been in contact with and therefore, may have been exposed to the virus. The CTC caller then contacts people who have been in close contact with a confirmed case of coronavirus to provide advice and guidance and to refer them for testing. Additionally, callers collect valuable surveillance data (positive patient assessment) to inform the Department of Health about the coronavirus profile in Ireland.

## **Who is working in contact tracing centres and how many are there?**

There are over 1,500 people trained to work in CTCs. The CTC callers come from a variety of backgrounds. Some work in public health, some are Defence force cadets based in the Curragh, others work in public sector bodies like HIQA and the Revenue Commissioners, some are from universities and others work for the HSE.

## **What times do contact tracing centres operate?**

The CTCs all operate at different times, but contact tracers are making calls to contacts seven days a week between 8am and 9pm.

## **How are people working in contact tracing centres keeping themselves safe from COVID-19?**

People working in CTCs are implementing physical distancing while they are undertaking their work. They also have access to hand sanitiser and anti-bacterial wipes to ensure that their work station is clean.

## **How do people in the contact tracing centres know who to contact?**

If a person has tested positive for coronavirus, their information is input into a computer system, called the CovidCare Tracker. The callers have access to a password protected module within the CovidCare Tracker system used for the Contact Management Programme (CMP). Using the CovidCare Tracker IT system, the caller contacts the person with confirmed to have coronavirus to inform them of their test result and to find out who they have been in contact with (from 48 hours before the start of their symptoms). The information about the person's contacts is added into the CovidCare Tracker for other callers to contact.

It is essential to maintain people's confidentiality while undertaking this work, so each person is allocated a CovidCare Tracker ID on the system. Callers do not disclose the identity of the person confirmed to have COVID-19 to anyone contacted during this process.

## **What kind of questions will the contact tracer ask?**

The CTC caller will confirm the person's name, and ask the person's date of birth (DOB), the name of their GP, and their address. The CTC caller will ask a number of further questions including: whether the person is a healthcare worker, whether the person lives in a congregated residential setting, and whether they have previously received a detected / confirmed result in the past 3 months. The CTC caller will ask about symptoms, and the name and phone numbers of people they have been in contact with, and the setting of this contact (E.g. household, social, travel, healthcare), if relevant.

## **How are the callers trained?**

A HSE developed national training programme for everyone involved in the CMP has been developed. All callers receive an induction and undertake training to ensure that they are ready to make calls in the CTC, and that they are able to use the CovidCare Tracker system. They receive support and feedback from CTC support team leads and have access to super users and public health advice, if required. All training materials are accessible to the caller at any time to support them in their day-to-day work.

## **How do people know that someone from a contact tracing centre has tried to contact them?**

The CTC caller contacts the number they have been provided with. This will show up on the person's phone as a private number, or the display may say "no caller ID". If the person doesn't answer their phone, and the voicemail is activated, the CTC caller will leave a message to let the person know that they have tried to contact the person and they will call the person again. Typically, three attempts are made at any call 1, 2 or 3, after which point they are passed to regional Departments of Public Health for follow-up.

## **Can people contact the contact tracing centre directly?**

No, people can't contact the CTC directly or return missed calls. Be assured the callers will make more than one attempt to reach the person. The callers will call people again if required. There is also a lot of information on coronavirus and contact tracing on [www.hse.ie](http://www.hse.ie) and [www.hpsc.ie](http://www.hpsc.ie) for people to access if required.

## **Can someone else be nominated to take the call on the person's behalf?**

If the person requires additional support on the call (e.g. if English isn't their first language, if they require support to understand the information that they are being given, or if they are unwell at the time), and they would like someone to take the call on their behalf, they can nominate someone to do this for them. The person can mention this if they are being tested and give the name and number of the nominated contact for inclusion on the system. If a person chooses to nominate someone to support them with the call, the CTC caller will conduct the call with this support person. If English is not their first language, they will be linked to a remote interpreter service.

## **Are translation services available?**

Translation services are available if people require the information in a different language.