

Additional Factors to Determine Close Contacts of Persons with COVID-19

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TO:	Health Alert Network
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SUBJECT:	Additional Factors to Determine Close Contacts of Persons with COVID-19
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This transmission is a “Health Advisory”, provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action.

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- Identification and quarantine of close contacts associated with individuals infected with COVID-19 is critical to the public health response as it can help slow disease transmission.
- Transmission is most commonly spread when two people are in close contact with one another (within 6 feet, or 2 arm lengths).
- The nature and duration of contact also need to be considered when assessing close contacts. In general, time periods of 15 minutes or more appear to present the greatest risk.
- This message is being disseminated to further clarify new guidance from CDC regarding how the 15-minute exposure time should be assessed and suggested implementation in PA.

This Health Advisory provides recommendations and considerations for determining close contacts to people with SARS-CoV-2 infection. Pennsylvania Department of Health (DOH) provides this guidance based on available information about COVID-19 and is subject to change.

On October 21, 2020, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) updated its [definition](#) of close contact to “someone who was within 6 feet of an infected person for a **cumulative total** of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period.” The guidance goes on to note that data to precisely define “close contact” are limited, and that there are additional factors to consider when defining “close contact.”

DOH recommends using 15 **consecutive** minutes of exposure at a distance of 6 feet or less as an operational definition for “close contact.” **However**, there are circumstances when someone should be considered a close contact of a case after being within 6 feet for fewer than 15 consecutive minutes.

Additional factors that should be considered when assessing close contacts include:

- Being in extremely close proximity (e.g., face to face).
- Having a prolonged exposure time.
- The infected person exhibiting symptoms.
- The infected person generating respiratory aerosols (e.g., coughing, singing, shouting).
- The presence of environmental conditions (e.g., crowding, inadequate ventilation, or being indoors).

These factors may result in a person being identified as a close contact even if contact time is less than 15 consecutive or cumulative minutes. In addition, individuals with numerous brief interactions totaling 15 minutes or more can be considered close contacts if this can easily be assessed operationally. Assessing the nature of the interaction in its entirety is important to determining the risk of transmission in that specific scenario.

If a patient is identified as being a close contact of a COVID-19 case, DOH strongly recommends that they be tested for SARS-CoV-2 at least 2-3 days after the exposure, regardless of the presence of symptoms. Information about insurance coverage and COVID-19 testing can be found [here](#). Results should be reported to DOH within 24 hours of the test's completion.

If you have questions about this guidance, please call your local health department or **1-877-PA-HEALTH (1-877-724-3258)**.

Individuals interested in receiving further PA-HANs are encouraged to register at <https://han.pa.gov/>.

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Health Alert: conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention.

Health Advisory: provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action.

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This information is current as of October 26, 2020 but may be modified in the future. We will continue to post updated information regarding the most common questions about this subject.