

# USPS Close COVID-19 Contact Investigations Overview

When an employee reports a positive case, the OHNA contacts the local or state health department to determine if they will conduct the workplace close contact investigation of positive COVID-19 cases. Because this infection is a reportable case, it is their legal jurisdiction and responsibility to conduct these investigations. These are the typical steps most health departments take when conducting the close contact investigations:

## Local Health Department Close Contact Investigation Query

1. Occupational Health Nurse Administrator (OHNA) notifies the local health department of a COVID-19 positive case (received from employee, family member health care provider, hospital, etc.)
2. The local health department requests employee contact information from USPS (if needed)
3. The local health department contacts employee and conducts close contact investigation and advises employee on what steps to take as far as quarantining
4. The local health department may request information from USPS for additional employees that they need to contact
5. Local health department may or may not share information with USPS about affected employees

(Also, the local health department may notify the OHNA of a completed close contact investigation of workplace exposures, prior to our knowledge of a case. Typically they do not provide the employees' names due to HIPPA-occasionally some do).

## USPS Close Contact Investigations

Due to the large numbers of cases, many public health departments do not have the capacity to conduct workplace contact investigations. In their absence, the Postal Service's Occupational Health Department conducts them.

If the health department cannot conduct the investigation, or in a timely manner (within 48 hours of the call), the OHNA asks the local health department to provide their contact investigation guidelines and questions.

**CORONAVIRUS DISEASE 2019 (COVID-19) CLOSE-CONTACT REVIEW PROCESS**  
**UPDATED: March 30, 2020**

*The following provides instructions on how to handle circumstances in which a management official is contacted by:*

- *An employee, family member, union official, or any other employee who informs management the employee has a confirmed case of COVID-19, but who does not immediately provide independent confirmation.*

If the employee is self-reporting a confirmed positive COVID-19 finding, request employee complete PS Form 2488 *Authorization to Use or Disclose Protected Health Information* and then request independent confirmation from a medical provider or health department Management Official and District Occupational Health Nurse Administrator (OHNA). Consistent with the provisions of the Privacy Act and the Rehabilitation Act, confidential health and medical information should be forwarded to the OHNA. If the employee is hospitalized, ask for a family member's assistance in ascertaining the independent confirmation information, if possible.

- Contact the employee's immediate supervisor and identify public workspaces the employee may reasonably have visited (e.g., postal vehicles, carrier case, restroom, swing room, etc.) within the last 5 days. Instruct the supervisor to ensure these spaces have been cleaned consistent with the requirements contained in Maintenance Management Order -031-20 (MMO).
- Contact the employee and instruct him/her to remain at home and follow guidance issued by the local public health department (if applicable). Determine the extent of any possible exposure.
- Ask the employee to provide the names of close contacts (6 feet 10-minute exposure).
  - Add the employee(s) to the COVID-19 tracker.
  - Contact the public health official and ask if they will conduct a workplace close-contact investigation.
- *A healthcare professional or public health department confirming that an employee has been diagnosed with COVID-19.*

If the OHNA has not received any input from the local public health department; if the public health department cannot conduct a workplace close-contact investigation in a timely manner (within 36 hours); or if it's more than 36 hours after the OHNA's call to the public health department official, the OHNA should proceed with the close-contact investigation.

- Contact the employee. In the event the employee is unavailable for health reasons (e.g., hospitalized), contact the employee's immediate supervisor for assistance in determining the extent of any possible exposure.
- Questions to ask the employee or supervisor include:
  - When was the employee last at work?
  - How long was the employee inside a postal building during his/her workday?
  - Did the employee drive any postal vehicles? Which ones?
  - Did the employee wear a mask or gloves while he/she was at work?
  - Did the employee come into close contact (six (6) feet or less for more than 10 minutes) with other employees during his/her last seven (7) calendar days at work?
  - Describe the contact. (NOTE: If employee or supervisor does not sufficiently answer the questions below during this response, please continue with questions).
  - How close was the employee to the other employees? Direct (physical contact) or indirect (within six (6) feet but not touching)?
  - How frequent was the contact?
  - How long was the contact?
  - Has the employee experienced any COVID-19 symptoms (e.g., fever, cough, shortness of breath)? Did the employee experience any COVID-19 symptoms during his/her last seven (7) calendar days at work?
  - Does anyone in the employee's household have confirmed COVID-19?
  - Is anyone in the employee's household under self-quarantine for COVID-19 exposure?
  - Is anyone in the employee's household exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19?
  - Did the employee have any contact with someone who has confirmed COVID-19, was under quarantine for COVID-19, or has exhibited COVID-19 symptoms, within the past 14 days?

Contact employees identified in the conversation with the employee or supervisor above and ask whether they are exhibiting any symptoms and verify they were on close contact. Continue until you account for all potential exposures.

If the employee is identified as a close contact, advise the employee that per our investigation, he/she was in close contact with a symptomatic COVID-19 positive co-worker, and that he/she should self-quarantine for 14 days or otherwise not report to work.

Contact the District or Area HR Manager, inform them of number of quarantined employees. Add quarantined employees to the COVID-19 Tracker.

- *A public health official stating that an employee has a confirmed case of COVID-19 and the public health department has conducted an investigation concerning the extent of the workplace exposure.*
  - Contact the public health official and record the extent of the health official's investigation, noting any USPS employees that the public health department has determined were likely exposed to COVID-19. Inquire whether those employees have been ordered to self-quarantine, should be ordered to self-quarantine, or are otherwise under medical care.
  - Contact the District or Area HR Manager, inform them of number of quarantined employees.\. Contact any employee who will be ordered to self-quarantine (14 days) or otherwise not report to work.
  - Contact the employee's immediate supervisor and identify public workspaces the employee has visited (e.g., postal vehicles, carrier case, restroom, swing room, etc.) within the last 5 days. Instruct the supervisor to ensure these spaces have been cleaned pursuant to the MMO.
  - Add employee(s) to the COVID-19 tracker.