HAWAI'I DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH USES NEW DIGITAL TOOL TO ENHANCE CONTACT TRACING AND MONITORING CAPACITY

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HONOLULU – The Hawai'i Department of Health (DOH) is using a new digital tool to follow up with individuals who have had close contact with a person identified by DOH as having COVID-19. The tool will improve the efficiency of data collection by public health staff.

Until now, Department of Health employees have undertaken the time-consuming task of daily phone calls to monitor those at risk for infection. Those individuals being monitored can now input and upload information on their health status on their own. They take a less than 5-minute online survey and transmit their responses directly and securely to the Department of Health. All information is encrypted to protect the privacy of the individual.

"Having a well-developed contact tracing and monitoring system with timely investigations, especially in underserved areas, is one of the criteria for reopening our state," said Bruce Anderson, director of the Department of Health. "The efficiency of this new system will increase our capacity to identify new cases and their contacts. We estimate this tool may allow us to monitor up to 5 times more new contacts than previously and thereby enhance our efforts to prevent the spread of COVID-19."

The tool was developed by HealthSpace, a cloud-based platform with more than 20 years of experience in offering data solutions to local and state public health agencies in the United States and Canada. The Department of Health has contracted HealthSpace, which has contracts with over 500 health departments, many of whom are adopting this tool in their fight against COVID-19.

The secure portal protects an individual's privacy by providing each person a unique link that expires after 24 hours. The information is then stored on a secure HIPAA-compliant server. Once an individual uploads their health information, surge capacity workers, who may serve as an extension of the Department of Health staff, are allowed limited access to the contacts assigned to them. Surge capacity staff include DOH employees who have been redirected to support the Disease Outbreak Control Division (DOCD) as well as persons with appropriate experience and

vetted by DOCD.

When a person has been identified as a close contact of a person with COVID-19, Department of Health staff will call the person to notify them of their exposure. The person is then required to remain at home and monitor their health for 14 days from the last contact with the case. The individual will be asked to provide an email or cell phone number to automatically receive a daily survey. The survey will ask if they have a fever, cough, shortness of breath, or other symptoms that could be signs of COVID-19.

Anyone can opt-out of receiving these messages if they prefer or do not have access to the internet, and DOH staff will call them to collect their health information for daily monitoring.

It is important to note that the online survey will not collect location information and will only be viewed by Department of Health staff and not shared with any other organization.

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PDF: Hawai‘i Department of Health uses new digital tool to enhance contact tracing and monitoring capacity