State Public Health Officials Release COVID-19 Contact Tracing Data

Press Release - Friday, November 06, 2020

Chicago — Today, Governor JB Pritzker and the Illinois Department of Public Health reported COVID-19 data related to the state's contact tracing operation, building on the administration's commitment to transparency in its data-driven response to the pandemic. This includes statewide COVID-19 data related to outbreaks and exposure locations as well as school-level data in both categories. This statewide data represents all data submitted to the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) by the 97 certified local health departments statewide that are responsible for leading contact tracing in their counties and cities. As of late October, 57 of the 97 local health departments are reaching out to more than 90 percent of cases and 86 of the 97 are reaching out to 75 percent or more.

While outbreak investigators pursue reports of multiple cases occurring in a single location, outbreak data is limited due to the unique challenges in pinpointing the exact location of multiple, epidemiologically linked cases. However, exposure data revealed by contact tracing is much more robust, and the largest single category of possible exposure to COVID-19 is restaurants and bars, a trend that is largely consistent across state regions.

To view the newly released data, go to: **http://www.dph.illinois.gov/covid19/contact-tracing**

"Across the state, the majority of our 97 local health departments are reaching out to 90 percent or more of individuals who test positive, with 88 percent reaching out to at least 3 of every 4 cases," **said Governor JB Pritzker.** "Their work offers us further insight into the most common outbreak and exposure locations across the state - this information, in addition to broader scientific research on COVID-19, not only guides our mitigation efforts but should serve as a resource to residents as they work to keep themselves and their families safe. Just like wearing a mask, answering a contact tracer's call is a way to help keep your family safe and protect your community - and that's going to be even more important with community transmission as high as it is."

"Contact tracing needs during this pandemic are on the order of nothing we've ever seen before and it is an all hands-on-deck effort with local health departments and community-based organizations," **said IDPH Director Dr. Ngozi Ezike.** "Public health officials are working with millions of COVID-19-related data points every day and we want to share this data and what it means in a responsible and educative way to help the public make informed decisions."

CONTACT TRACING METRICS

The state continues to work with local health departments across the state to assist them in building out their contact tracing efforts and expects contact tracing data reporting to improve as local health departments continue implementation of new technology. Most local health departments are

contacting greater than 90 percent of cases in their jurisdictions. Beginning in July, IDPH has awarded $237 million in grants to Illinois' 97 certified local health departments to increase contact tracing efforts, including hiring staff, to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. The localized approach to contact tracing ensures that health care staff are reaching out to members of their own communities, helping to build trust and better engagement with the program.

One of the challenges with contact tracing is the public's reluctance to answer a phone call from a number they don't recognize. To make it easier for Illinois residents to identify when a contact tracer is attempting to make contact with them, all calls made by contact tracers have the caller ID "IL COVID HELP." Since this change took effect on Thursday, October 29th, answer rates for both calls to confirmed cases and close contacts have started to improve.

The data available on the IDPH website is representative of information collected by local health departments from their contact tracers. Local health departments are continuing to build out their operations. Metrics are available by region and by local health department as well.

EXPOSURE AND OUTBREAK DATA

Beginning today, the state will publish data representing outbreaks and exposure locations for cases of COVID-19 in a variety of setting types, to be updated on a weekly basis.

The location of an outbreak is more difficult to identify than the location of an exposure. In this first batch of released data, an outbreak is defined as five or more cases that are linked to a specific setting during a 14-day period. Linked cases must be from different households and not already connected from other sources. While certain settings like a college campus, a factory, or group home make it easier to determine an outbreak, most establishments that are frequented by the public, like restaurants or grocery stores, are harder to determine as the setting of an outbreak.

Exposure data is gathered by contact tracers who ask individuals to recall places and businesses they visited in the 14 days preceding the onset of their symptoms or a positive COVID-19 test. Most individuals will have more than one potential exposure location. Exposure data provides Illinois residents with information regarding where they are at the greatest risk for catching COVID-19.

In Illinois, the largest single category of exposure statewide is restaurants and bars, a trend that is broadly consistent across state regions. Workplaces and schools are also high on the list of Illinois exposure locations due to the sheer number of people who report to an office or attend in-person learning.

SCHOOL DATA

Protecting the health and safety of Illinois's students, teachers, and educational staff has been a high priority for the Pritzker administration since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. To provide further clarity into how the virus is impacting places of learning, the state is now making school specific data collected from contact tracing efforts publicly available online. The data is broken down by individual schools, counties and three age groups: 5-11 years, 12-17 years, and 18-22 years. State-level data is not all inclusive as it is limited to outbreaks reported by local health departments and exposure data collected through contact tracing. Individual schools and local health departments remain the most

accurate and immediate source of data, which will then get reported by local health departments to IDPH. School districts are required to notify guardians of potential exposure to COVID-19.

As of Friday, November 6, 10 schools across the state are currently experiencing outbreaks. The reported outbreaks do not include secondary cases that may occur in a household member who has not been in school grounds; however, the data does include people who associated with a COVID-positive student or staff during before and after school programs, like sports. All school-related data will be updated on a weekly basis.

To prevent the further spread of COVID-19, Illinois residents over the age of two years are required to wear a face covering when out in public and social distancing is not easily achievable. Anyone exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19 or who may have been in contact with someone exhibiting symptoms or who has tested positive for the virus should seek out testing and isolate at home.

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