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News Release
November 13, 2020

Contact information

Health department to begin texting program to reach positive cases, close contacts

The Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) will soon expand its toolkit for case investigation and contact tracing (CICT) by notifying people via text that the health department will be calling.

The initiative aims to more effectively reach and inform those who test positive for COVID-19 and their close contacts about what they need to do to prevent further spread, and to better protect the state's most vulnerable populations through improved outreach and communication. The texting is expected to begin Monday, Nov. 16.

"Reaching every single person by phone who needs information is a monumental task," said Minnesota Commissioner of Health Jan Malcolm. "Our staff and our partners in local public health and tribal health have done enormous work in this area, and will continue to do so. We ask all Minnesotans to do their part by answering the call, and we hope this text notification helps provide some notice and reassurance."

“We have information and resources to share with Minnesotans, but we understand that many people are wary of answering a phone call from a number they don’t recognize,” said Chris Elvrum, MDH project spokesperson. “Sending the text lets people know we’re going to call and even tells them what number to expect the call from. Adding this tool boosts our chances of slowing the spread of COVID-19 by increasing the number of people who answer the call and successfully isolate themselves.”

A text message will be sent to people identified as a case or the contact of a case to let them know that a case interviewer from state, local or tribal health departments will be calling to discuss their COVID-19 test results or potential exposure.

The text message is simple:
Answer the Call: State and local public health department staff will be calling you with important information about your health. Please answer the call from xxx-xxx-xxxx. This is an automated text message, please do not reply.

The phone number in the text will vary depending on the region of the state the person is in and will help people know what number to look for so more calls get answered and interviews get completed.

Case interviewers from MDH as well as local public health and tribal health not only gather valuable information from positive cases about the outbreak, but also provide connections to resources to help all Minnesotans reduce the risk of infection.

Combating fears about calls from scammers pretending to be public health workers is another important part of the project. Getting a text message and knowing what number to expect a call from will help, but there are a few other things to know.

Case interviewers will talk to you about:

- Symptoms you may be experiencing.
- People you may have been in contact with.
- How to avoid getting other people sick.

Case interviewers will never ask for a Social Security Number, bank account information, or credit card numbers. Anyone with questions can visit the MDH website for more information on Avoiding Phone Scams. (/news/phonescams.html)

Since the beginning of the pandemic, the goals of case investigation and contact tracing have remained the same: To contact people who have or were exposed to COVID-19, help people isolate themselves to prevent spreading the virus and educate people on reducing their risk. Each case successfully isolating can prevent dozens of people from contracting the disease.

MDH has engaged with a broad array of stakeholders and public health community partners to assist with case investigation and contact tracing. Those who help guide and support this work include tribal government and tribal public health, local public health, advocacy groups, disability advocacy groups, community-based groups representing people of color and indigenous people, counties, workforce partners around the state, colleges and universities and others.

For more information on case investigation and contact tracing, see Tracing COVID-19 (/diseases/coronavirus/tracing.html).

-MDH-

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