Georgia Department of Public Health Adds Staff, Expands Contact Tracing for COVID-19

MAY 12, 2020

Atlanta – The Georgia Department of Public Health (DPH) is increasing its workforce to expand contact tracing for COVID-19 in Georgia. Contact tracing is used to identify and mitigate hotspots of infection to help prevent further spread of the virus.

Currently, about 250 contact tracers are deployed throughout the state. To date, more than 3,800 individuals testing positive for COVID-19 have been contacted and nearly 13,000 contacts identified.

In partnership with the CDC Foundation, a deployment coordinator and a training and learning coordinator have joined DPH's COVID-19 response team. Together these individuals will oversee the training and deployment of hundreds of contact tracers being hired by the Department. They will work closely with the 18 public health districts to ensure operational issues and staffing needs are addressed, and that performance metrics established by DPH and district leadership are met.

DPH's goal is to have over 1,000 contact tracers within weeks to strengthen its contact tracing efforts. Training is underway for 200 new contact tracers and 70 medical students and M.P.H. candidates who joined DPH in the past two weeks.

Along with the additional contact tracers, DPH is introducing a new online monitoring tool developed by Google/MTX to make contact tracing more efficient. Once a COVID-19 case is identified, public health staff work with that individual to help them recall everyone they have had close contact with and where they went while they may have been infectious. Contacts identified during this interview will be called by trained DPH staff indicating that they have been exposed to COVID-19

and asking them to enroll in DPH symptom monitoring and informing them that they must self-quarantine for 14 days after the exposure.

The web-based portal allows identified contacts to easily answer questions about their health and their symptoms related to COVID-19. If the contact reports symptoms, the system will prompt the individual to call 911 if they are in a medical emergency or to consult with their healthcare provider if they are sick and need medical care. Individuals with mild symptoms who do not need medical care will then be provided information on how to schedule COVID-19 testing.

Contacts will receive a daily text message for 14 days reminding them to report if they have symptoms through the monitoring tool, and they will also receive information about what to do if they are or become sick. Individuals who do not report daily will be contacted by DPH. For people who do not wish to use the online system or receive texts, they can call DPH directly to report their symptoms.

Confidentiality is critical to the success of contact tracing. Contact tracing in Georgia is 100% confidential – the identity of the person who tests positive and the information on those who might have been exposed will not be shared. Georgia's contact tracing does not use GPS or Bluetooth technology to track movements. The monitoring tool does not collect any data other than what is entered by the contact.

For more information about COVID-19 visit **https://dph.georgia.gov/novelcoronavirus (https://gcc01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fdph.georgia.gov%2Fnovelcoronavirus&data=02%7C01%7Ckristian.weatherspoon%40dph.ga.gov%7Cea8db4388afd4c34b0f008d7f6b92a66%7C512da10d071b4b948abc9ec4044d1516%7C0%7C0%7C637249148026073409&sdata=DgQc4jV%2FjoIbAqjvy8cWL6IDqgh3lcM08LQzq5yiFUQ%3D&reserved=0)** or **https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html (https://gcc01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Findex.html&data=02%7C01%7Ckristian.weatherspoon%40dph**

.ga.gov%7Cea8db4388afd4c34b0f008d7f6b92a66%7C512da10d071b4b948abc9ec4044d1516%7C0%7C0%7C637249148026083398&sdata=HQP4H3UlUlU7%2B7L3Owy%2FX4GAyPJ8iv2zXZCoiJouQSg%3D&reserved=0).

For updates on the COVID-19 situation as it develops, follow @GaDPH, @GeorgiaEMA, and @GovKemp on Twitter, and @GaDPH, @GEMA.OHS, and @GovKemp on Facebook.