



Jackson County Department of Public Health

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To: Jackson County Community & Stakeholders

From: Jackson County Department of Public Health

Re: Contact Tracing is Disease Detective Work

During disease outbreaks, one of the best tools public health staff have is contact tracing. This “detective work” involves finding a sick person and figuring out who they’ve recently interacted with. Contact tracing helps public health staff get outbreaks of disease like COVID-19 under control. Contact tracing is based on the basic idea that people in close contact with someone who is sick with a disease like COVID-19 are at a higher risk of getting sick themselves. This process is lengthy, time consuming, but very important.

When a sick person is diagnosed with a reportable disease like COVID-19, their healthcare provider reports this positive laboratory result to the Jackson County Department of Public Health (JCDPH). JCDPH staff then reach out to that person to make sure that they are following isolation orders, have access to basic needs like food, and track their symptoms. JCDPH staff also interview that person to see who they have been around recently, what stores they have shopped at recently, what restaurants they have eaten at recently, and more. Essentially, JCDPH staff develop a list of where the person has been and who they’ve been around. This detective work often involves the collaboration of other healthcare providers, other Health Departments, and more.

Based on the information given by the sick person, JCDPH staff reach out to those who were potentially exposed, i.e. close contacts. Staff interview the close contacts, assess their risk of exposure, and determine if they need to take any additional measures like monitor themselves for symptoms or get tested.

Sometimes a sick person is unable to provide a clear picture of all the places and persons that they have been or may have come in contact with. This is especially true if the sick person has shopped at a large retail store, works in a large worksite, etc. At this point, Health Department staff may share a timeframe and location where a sick person may have been in order to protect the public’s health. Anyone in the general public that was at that location during that timeframe will be encouraged to monitor their symptoms and/or get tested.

In all, know that the Jackson County Department of Public Health is working diligently to track all of the close contacts of positive cases of COVID-19 in our community. **If you are identified as a close contact of a positive case, you will be called and your risk assessed.**

As always, look to reliable sources of information like the CDC, NC DHHS, or JCDPH. For questions, call the Jackson County EOC at 828-631-HELP or JCDPH at 828-586-8994.

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