

**To the Mayor and Members of the City Council****June 16, 2020**

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SUBJECT: COVID19 – CONTACT TRACING**Executive Summary**

On June 2, 2020, City Council requested an update on Contact Tracing (CT) for COVID19 positive residents. Tarrant County Public Health (TCPH) is the Health Authority for the entire county and is solely responsible for CT. General inquiries on CT and other COVID19/public health issues should be directed to Tarrant County Public Health at (817) 648-2499 (COVID19 Hotline).

While large populous areas of the nation, including population centers in Texas, struggled with testing and contact tracing resources early-on, most have significantly increased capacity and additional capacity continues to be added. The City and TCPH have coordinated with UNTHSC to use medical students and educators to supplement staff resources for contact tracing, testing, telephone support, reporting, education and other critical services (56 temporary staff). Working with Workforce Solutions, TCPH expects to add 60 additional temporary staff in the near future.

Contact tracing is a critical component of disease containment and mitigation. In preparation for future viral surges later this summer into the fall and winter, TCPH is working with the Department of State Health Services on coordinated data and resource sharing to safeguard the appropriate response.

Contact Tracing Process

Viral testing is performed by both private and public labs. This includes hospitals, clinics, mobile, drive up, walk up and other similar operations. It also includes public labs like Tarrant County Public Health, although public labs tend to have less/minimal capacity.

Any lab that receives a positive test must report the finding the local Health Authority. While Fort Worth once had its own Health Authority, it was moved to TCPH in 2009 as part of the consolidation of public health with the County. As such, TCPH is the City's Health Authority and receives all positive result data and is responsible for all contact tracing.

Once TCPH is notified of a positive result, they initiate a call to the patient and collect information on the patient's travel/contacts during the period that they would have been contagious. TCPH then attempts to make contact with others who might have been exposed during the contagious period. Contact tracing is most effective when people have had fewer contacts with strangers, have not travelled as much and practiced social distancing. It is much more difficult during periods of sustained community spread, where populations gather in large groups, travel frequently, and do not practice social distancing.

TCPH will follow-up with positive patients at different intervals and/or as required to carry out additional contact tracing. As part of the process, they will give patients instructions on self-isolation and updated guidance on when they can end the isolation. Through their Hotline, they can also answer general patient questions about the virus, social distancing and how to receive additional medical assistance if needed.

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The City coordinates with TCPH on contact tracing through the City's Health Officer/Code Compliance Director. Specifically, the agencies coordinate to identify known or suspected health risks to first responders. As an example, a resident exposure would be helpful information so that first responders can make sure that they are wearing proper PPE, are limiting the number of staff involved, and implement special care and transport protocols to reduce viral transmission/risks.

The agencies also coordinate on special populations such homeless shelters and nursing/resident care homes and local jails where the potential for viral spread is greater and the health risks higher because of a more susceptible population. Consequently, testing and contact tracing are especially important in these facilities.

City Employee/Work Place Tracing

TCPH is also responsible for notifying City employees if they are exposed (known) to a COVID19 positive person. TCPH has a unique method for applying HIPPA protections and limits the sharing of data much more so than other agencies. Given this, the City will also perform HIPPA protected contact tracing in the workplace in an effort to reduce disease transmission at City facilities.

Currently, employee contact tracing is coordinated through the Joint Emergency Operations Center (JEOC) and departmental Medical Records Custodians (MRC). Once the appropriate departmental or JEOC staff are alerted of a positive Covid-19 employee, staff initiate the trace back protocols in an effort to make a determination of risk exposure which could include isolation as well as testing of other city staff.

For more information, please contact Brandon Scott Bennett, Code Compliance Director/Health Officer at (817) 392-6322.

David Cooke
City Manager