

Dept. of Health Services: Announces new electronic communications to notify COVID-19 close contacts

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The Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) today announced that people who have been in close contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 can be sent a text or email notifying them of their exposure to COVID-19. This is another way to share important information with close contacts in a timely manner. People who test positive for COVID-19 will continue to receive a phone call from a contact tracer.

“As COVID-19 cases in Wisconsin rise in large part due to the highly transmissible Delta variant, and particularly among people who haven’t been vaccinated, we need to find more ways to get information to folks as quickly as we can,” said Governor Evers. “The ability to text and email information to close contacts will be a valuable tool for our critical contact tracing efforts that remain an important part of our work to stop the spread of COVID-19.”

When contact tracers call people who have tested positive for COVID-19, they collect information about their close contacts. Based on the information provided, the contact tracer can send a text or email to the close contacts. The text will be sent from 844-939-2782 and the message will read, “Health alert: You have been identified as a close contact to COVID-19. Follow this link for more information [https://wedss.wisconsin.gov/self-reporting/#/form/abR_R-PgQMC78gbifjr-EQ\(link is external\)](https://wedss.wisconsin.gov/self-reporting/#/form/abR_R-PgQMC78gbifjr-EQ(link is external)). Education for close contacts [https://wedss.wisconsin.gov/self-reporting/content/education_for_close_contacts.pdf\(link is external\)](https://wedss.wisconsin.gov/self-reporting/content/education_for_close_contacts.pdf(link is external)).” People without access to a cell phone with texting capability or to email may still receive a phone call.

“It is important that people who get tested for COVID-19 answer the phone calls from their health department or DHS, and it’s also important that people who are identified as a close contact take the time to read through the educational information that will be provided to learn about what it means to be a close contact, what the risks are, and what they can do to avoid further spreading COVID-19,” said DHS Secretary-designee Karen Timberlake. “By understanding quarantine and testing guidance based on our own unique situations, we can make informed decisions and best protect ourselves and others around us.”

The DHS COVID-19 Contact Tracing Team and many of Wisconsin’s local and tribal health department staffers will be using text and email to notify close contacts. This is different from the [Wisconsin Exposure Notification app](#), which exchanges anonymous signals with other phones that are near it for at least 15 minutes and allows people who test positive to send an alert to other nearby phones. The Wisconsin Exposure Notification app is available for download from the Google Play Store, or can be enabled in settings on your iPhone. Together, all tools help to notify a greater number of close contacts, provide education, and next steps for staying safe.

With the high level of disease transmission in Wisconsin, DHS is also urging everyone to get vaccinated against COVID-19 and add additional layers of protection including masking up in public indoor spaces, staying home when feeling sick, and avoiding large gatherings.