



Update to Close Contact Definition October 23, 2020

To: Local Health Departments

On 10/21/20 CDC modified the definition of a close contact regarding the length of time associated with exposure and the time interval to assess the potential exposure that can result in transmission.

Data are limited, making it difficult to precisely define “close contact;” however, 15 cumulative minutes of exposure at a distance of 6 feet or less can be used as an operational definition for contact investigation. The definition now includes a total of 15 minutes or more of close contact (within 6 feet) exposure to an infected person during a 24-hour period. Please note that the period of exposure is **cumulative** (i.e., the total amount when it is added together). This exposure must occur when the infected person is considered to be infectious which begins 2 days prior to symptom onset, or specimen collection for asymptomatic cases, and extends for most people for 10 days after onset of symptoms and 1 day after fever has resolved. Some individuals with more severe illness or who are immunocompromised may be infectious for up to 20 days.

In summary, the new definition requires 15 minutes or more of close contact (within 6 feet) of exposure to an infected person during a 24-hour period in which the infected person is infectious.

It is also important to note that classification of an individual as a close contact is based on many factors and should be assessed on a case-by-case basis. Factors to consider when defining close contact include proximity (closer distance likely increases exposure risk), the duration of exposure (longer exposure time likely increases exposure risk), whether the infected individual has symptoms (the period around onset of symptoms is associated with the highest levels of viral shedding), if the infected person was likely to generate respiratory aerosols (e.g., was coughing, singing, shouting), and other environmental factors (crowding, adequacy of ventilation, whether exposure was indoors or outdoors).

NJDOH will be adopting the revised CDC definition effective immediately. This is a change from our previous definition of 10 minutes of consecutive exposure.

***NEW! Close Contact:** Someone who was within 6 feet of an infected person for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period starting from 2 days before illness onset (or, for asymptomatic patients, 2 days prior to test specimen collection) until the time the patient is isolated.*

LHDs and contact tracing staff are asked to use the 15 minutes or more of cumulative exposure in a 24-hour period when identifying close contacts of COVID-19 cases. NJDOH is working on updating all documents with these changes, and these will be re-posted to the website once complete.

References:

- CDC Contact Tracing Page: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/contact-tracing/contact-tracing-plan/appendix.html#contact>
- MMWR “COVID-19 in a Correctional Facility Employee Following Multiple Brief Exposures to Persons with COVID-19 — Vermont, July–August 2020”
https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/pdfs/mm6943e1-H.pdf?ACSTrackingID=USCDC_921-DM40859&ACSTrackingLabel=MMWR%20Early%20Release%20-%20Vol.%2069%2C%20October%2021%2C%202020&deliveryName=USCDC_921-DM40859