

Contact Tracing and COVID-19

POLICY SNAPSHOT

Contact tracing is the process of identifying individuals who have an infectious disease and communicating with people they came in contact with to help prevent further spread. It is a core disease control activity that has been used by health departments for decades for several diseases, including tuberculosis, HIV and sexually transmitted infections. Contact tracing has been identified as a key component in the coronavirus pandemic for controlling outbreaks, managing COVID-19 cases and reopening safely. Although this public health tool is well established, the scale and speed required by the extent of COVID-19 cases among the U.S. population is unprecedented.

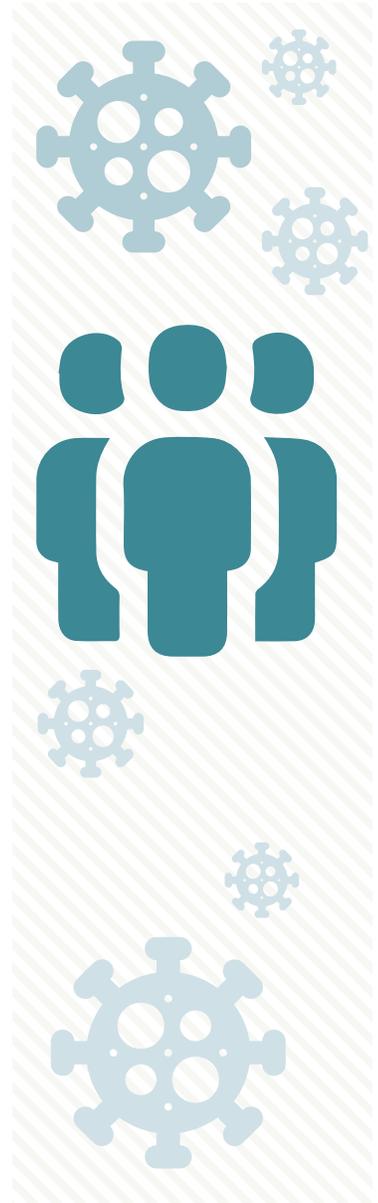
This policy snapshot includes state policy options to bolster contact tracing efforts and facilitate cooperation between tracers and contacts,

as well as relevant state examples, federal action and additional resources.

State Policy Options

State legislators may consider the following policy options to support state capacities to carry out and facilitate participation in contact tracing during the COVID-19 crisis, and in preparation for future pandemics:

- Ensure adequate resources and funding.
- Recruit and coordinate a contact tracing workforce.
- Maintain confidentiality protocols and privacy protections for data collected.
- Increase awareness about contact tracing.



POLICY OPTIONS	STATE EXAMPLES
<p>Each state is managing its contact tracing plans differently, through a variety of approaches. Many state officials and health departments are leading in-house efforts, while others are partnering with organizations or contracting with a third party to secure staff, training and recruitment assistance. State legislatures are exploring ways to bolster these various efforts and support their state’s capacity to carry out contact tracing.</p>	
<p>Ensure adequate resources and funding. State and local health agencies already have experience employing case-based strategies to reduce the spread of infectious disease. Scaling these efforts to the levels needed to respond to COVID-19 requires an expanded workforce and investigation capacity, and adequate systems and resources.</p>	<p>Hawaii SB 75 appropriates \$14 million in funds received from the Payment Protection Program and Health Care Enhancement Act for COVID-19 outbreak control, contact tracing programs and personal protective equipment. Illinois SB 264 provides \$200 million from the Public Health Services Fund to the Department of Public Health for costs and administrative expenses associated with contact tracing and testing in response to COVID-19, including in areas disproportionately affected by the pandemic. North Carolina SB 808 appropriates \$125 million to the Department of Health and Human Services for testing, contact tracing, tracking and analyzing trends, and hiring temporary staff to augment contact tracing functions.</p>

POLICY OPTIONS	STATE EXAMPLES
<p>Recruit and coordinate a contact tracing workforce. The ability to build and maintain trust is an essential component of case investigation and contact tracing. To be done effectively, it requires a workforce with sensitive interpersonal skills and cultural competency appropriate to the local community. Certain factors, such as familiarity with various languages and cultural practices, may help the workforce efficiently support and communicate with patients and those with suspected cases.</p>	<p>District of Columbia Bill 759 establishes contact tracing hiring requirements, including a goal to hire at least 50% District residents and at least 25% graduates from a workforce development or adult education program funded or administered by the District of Columbia. New York SB 8362 requires the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene and New York City Health and Hospitals to hire COVID-19 contact tracers under certain criteria. They must represent the cultural and linguistic diversity of the communities they serve to the greatest extent possible as a means to both distribute employment opportunity equitably and provide efficient epidemiological services to the community. South Carolina HB 3411 directs the Department of Health and Environmental Control to identify no fewer than 1,000 contact tracers—through its own staff and/or community partnerships—who are best suited to interact with populations disproportionately affected by COVID-19.</p>
<p>Maintain confidentiality protocols and privacy protections for data collected. Maintaining confidentiality during COVID-19 case investigations is important for legal reasons as well as public trust. Traditional case investigation and contact tracing programs include privacy protections for personal information. Explicitly outlining these standards, particularly around the use of digital technologies, may strengthen willingness to participate in contact tracing.</p>	<p>California AB 89 directs the Department of Finance to allocate federal funding to support state contact tracing, provided that funds are not used for applications that collect information related to an individual's location and movement. Kansas HB 2016 enacts the COVID-19 contact tracing privacy act. It prohibits using any service or means that use cellphone data to identify or track, directly or indirectly, the movement of persons. Louisiana HCR 93 and HR 44 direct the governor to ensure that individual liberty and rights are protected as the state administers contact tracing.</p>
<p>Increase awareness about contact tracing. Actions to enhance transparency, increase public awareness, and address myths or doubts about the contact tracing process can help further build trust and cooperation.</p>	<p>District of Columbia Bill 776 authorizes the mayor to issue a grant or loan during a declared public health emergency to fund certain responses, including to increase awareness about and participation in disease investigation and contact tracing. South Carolina HB 5202 directs the Department of Health and Environmental Control to conduct a public awareness campaign to explain the use of contact tracing.</p>

Federal Action

The [Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security \(CARES\) Act](#) provided [\\$140 billion](#) for the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), including [\\$4.3 billion](#) to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Using these funds, CDC awarded [\\$631 million](#) to [64 jurisdictions](#) across the country to expand their capacity for testing, contact tracing and containment. The U.S. Department of Labor authorized [additional funding](#) through the Dislocated Worker Grant, also awarded through the CARES Act, for states and territories to hire a contact tracing workforce. In May, HHS delivered an additional [\\$11 billion](#) through the [Payment Protection Program and Health Care Enhancement Act](#) to support COVID-19 testing, surveillance, contact tracing and related activities.

Additional Resources

- [Contact Tracing](#) (CDC)
- [Contact Tracing](#) (John Hopkins University of Medicine)
- [State Approaches to Contact Tracing during the COVID-19 Pandemic](#) (National Academy for State Health Policy)
- [Contact Tracing Workforce Estimator](#) (George Washington University)
- [Roadmap to Recovery: A Public Health Guide for Governors](#) (National Governors Association and the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials [ASTHO], April 2020)
- [A National Plan to Enable Comprehensive COVID-19 Case Finding and Contact Tracing in the U.S.](#) (Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and ASTHO, April 2020)
- [COVID-19 Case Investigation and Contact Tracing: Considerations for Using Digital Technologies](#) (ASTHO, July 2020)
- [Encouraging Participation and Cooperation in Contact Tracing: Lessons From Survey Research](#) (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, August 2020)

Please note that NCSL takes no position on state legislation or laws mentioned in linked material, nor does NCSL endorse any third-party publications; resources are cited for informational purposes only.

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