

What does “contact tracing” mean? What will happen next?

Contact tracing is a cornerstone for public health in order to break the transmission of infection. COVID-19 is a reportable illness to St. Louis City and County and your local public health agency, which have an obligation to review your activities and contacts in order to alert close contacts of the possibility of infection.

The purpose of contact tracing is for early identification of other people who may have had a significant exposure to a COVID-19 infection, and to provide instructions on how to closely monitor themselves for possible symptoms, and on self-quarantine or isolation in order to prevent further spread of infection. The local Department of Public Health has the responsibility to identify all people (including those outside of WashU) who may have been in direct or close contact with a person who tested positive. WashU Occupational/Student Health communicates and coordinates with the Department of Public Health, and often participates in the internal contract tracing to determine the close contacts within the university community, by contacting all personnel with a positive COVID-19 test (if completed through or reported to the WashU Employee Call Center or Occupational/Student Health). Occupational/Student Health will coordinate with the Department of Health to contact all WashU personnel who meet the criteria for an exposure.

If you have tested positive, you will receive a call from an Occupational/Student health nurse and/or from the Department of Public Health. During this call you will likely be asked to recall all of your close contacts (see definition below) from 48 hours before your symptoms started. Occupational/Student Health will likely focus on your on-campus activities and the people with whom you came into contact, as well as your use of face coverings and personal protective equipment while on campus. Depending on the date of your test and your on-campus activities, you may be asked to identify your office or work area for cleaning.

Importantly, simply coming into brief contact with someone who tests positive for COVID-19 does not necessarily mean you have an exposure. Occupational/Student Health in conjunction with the Department of Health will determine your level of risk and appropriate next steps.

If it is determined that you had a “close contact” or “exposure” to a COVID-positive person on campus, you will receive a call from the Department of Public Health and/or Occupational/Student Health. Follow their instructions.

Please know that the Occupational/Student Health takes the confidentiality of your status very seriously and your information will only be shared when absolutely necessary to prevent the spread of COVID-19 to others.