



Keeping Our Families and Communities Healthy

The newsletter for Redirected State Staff working for the California Connected COVID-19 Contact Tracing Program

A Message from Holly Howard

It's amazing to think that 2020 is almost behind us. The year roared out of the starting gate and never seemed to take its foot off the gas. During the COVID-19 pandemic we've been doing our best to adapt to the changes in our lives necessary to keep ourselves and our loved ones safe and continuing to thrive in spite of 2020's strongest attempts to grind us down.

It's in that spirit of continuing resilience that I want to again recognize and appreciate the work that you all do as part of the California Connected effort. The endurance you've demonstrated under these circumstances is nearly impossible to overstate, and when we come out of the other end of this it's going to be in no small part due to everything you've done to trace and slow the spread of the virus.

As we see a new surge in cases and a resulting workload increase, please try to prioritize taking time for self-care as that investment will be crucial for keeping the endurance you'll need to get through these long, arduous days. Maintaining good health through restful sleep, a nutritious diet, exercise, and being present (though safely socially distanced, outside, and with masks, of course) with friends and family during the holidays will help to ensure that as we step into 2021 we remain in control of the current situation, and are prepared for whatever might lie ahead.

Thank you all, and Happy Holidays!

How are we doing? Let us know how we can improve this newsletter by completing our survey [here](#). Thank you!



-Holly Howard

Training Updates

Introducing: School Specialists

As schools throughout the state begin to reopen, California Connected is committed to ensuring that we are fully equipped to handle the unique challenges that might arise. The Virtual Training Academy team is developing a special training for a new role designed to expand the capabilities of our talented Case Investigators: School Specialists. If you'd like to learn more, or have experience working with schools and would be interested in this position, e-mail vta.uc.info@gmail.com



Save the Date

Dec. 14: VTA Classic Course - Learn the ins and outs of what it takes to work as a Case Investigator or Contact Tracer. [Register here.](#)

Dec. 14 & 15: School Specialist Training - This course expands the role of the Case Investigator to include important information specific to supporting California's K-12 schools as they begin to reopen. Get an overview of the system, a primer on Pediatric COVID, an introduction to Outbreak Management, and more. For more information or if you're interested in participating e-mail vta.uc.info@gmail.com

CalCONNECT Updates



Veterans Administration releases COVID Coach App

The COVID Coach App was created by the Veterans Administration to support self-care and overall mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is free to download for both Apple and Android devices and features:

- Education about coping during the pandemic
- Tools for self-care and to improving emotional well-being
- Trackers to check your mood and measure your growth towards personal goals
- Graphs to visualize progress over time.

The app is comprehensive and engaging, with something for everyone and lots to explore!

[Download the app for Android or iOS here.](#)

Tools & Resources

California Connected is dedicated to outfitting redirected staff with the tools they need and the training to use those tools effectively. Some examples include:

[Virtual Assistant](#) - Review this video to learn how the Virtual Assistant can provide background knowledge, answer common questions for cases and contacts, and perform initial outreach through the Outbound Virtual Agent Survey.

[CalCONNECT Guide](#) - Learn about CalCONNECT Guide, an interactive tool that provides step-by-step guidance to users and can be accessed at any time without leaving your screen.

Find more great information and tutorials on the [CDPH CalCONNECT Learning YouTube playlist here.](#)



Staff Spotlights

We reached out to redirected staff to get a better idea about their experiences working with the California Connected Contact Tracing Program. Each month we'd like to highlight their responses, and share with you what it means to be part of such an important effort.

Emefa Tsikata

Emefa is a Business Enterprise Consultant with the Department of Rehabilitation. She has been working for California Connected as both a Contact Tracer and a Case Investigator.



What have you enjoyed during your experience as a Contact Tracer/Case Investigator?

"I've enjoyed working to help stop the spread, while also having conversations with families and finding solutions and resources for them. I absolutely love speaking with people."

What has been your biggest challenge?

"Seeing the effects of the virus on families, financially, emotionally, and psychologically. I once spoke to a woman who lost her husband and son in 2019, then tested positive for COVID in September of this year. That was a really tough day. I cried after I got off of the phone and just said a prayer for her."

What have your friends and family thought about your work as a Contact Tracer/Case Investigator?

"They're proud and happy that I'm making a difference. I'd like to believe that they're taking [COVID-19] more seriously as a result. I've had a few of them ask me for advice on symptoms, distancing, etc. Plus, my family loves the fact that I get to work from home. (And I love that to.)"

What has been your biggest challenge during the pandemic?

"Not being able to go out with my children and having to explain to them why we can't go to Chuck E. Cheese's."

What are you looking forward to when things get back to normal?

"I hope to be able to do things I didn't do before. I want to live my life to the fullest and try to continue to make a difference in any way I can. I'd love to continue doing contact tracing work, even if only part time. I'm grateful for life."

Gina Alvarez-Lascano

Gina is an Office Manager with the Department of Motor Vehicles. She has been working for California Connected as a Supervisor.



What have you enjoyed during your experience as a Contact Tracer/Case Investigator?

"I have been with my department for almost 31 years and this opportunity not only allowed me to partake in helping others, but it also allowed me to meet so many fantastic people across the state who want to do the same."

What has been your biggest challenge?

"Realizing the training I received is very basic and local jurisdiction's processes can be very different. Adjust...and adjust some more - flexibility is key"

What have your friends and family thought about your work as a Contact Tracer/Case Investigator?

"My family has been very supportive and even helped me put together an awesome work space...a space for success!"

What has been your biggest challenge during the pandemic?

"I come from a large family - being away from my elderly parents, 9 brothers/sisters and my 48 nephews and nieces for long periods of time. We had to be innovative to find ways to stay connected. Also seeing many team members, colleagues and generally population struggle in coming to terms with the pandemic mentally, emotionally and even physically."

What are you looking forward to when things get back to normal?

"Being with family, going to Disneyland and eating indoors. Lesson learned: Don't take anything for granted."

We Want to Get to Know You!

Each month we'll be featuring a profile of a redirected staff member in this newsletter. If you'd like to share your story, please contact us at CAContactTracing@cdph.ca.gov

In Case You Missed It

We ARE California Connected Site is LIVE!

Last month we told you about an amazing new resource being rolled out intended to support and assist every member of the California Connected team. "We ARE California Connected" is very happy to announce that access to its website is now up and running, granting you access to get started with CliftonStrengths, motivational webinars, videos designed to build confidence and improve well-being, and so much more.

To get started, [simply click here!](#)



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BY THE NUMBERS

Stats & Figures About
the Contact Tracing Program

3076 REDIRECTED STAFF

1728 DEPLOYED STAFF

28 COUNTIES INVOLVED

COUNTY WITH THE MOST
DEPLOYED STAFF:

Los Angeles (819)

COUNTY WITH THE LEAST
DEPLOYED STAFF:

Trinity (3)
Inyo (3)



"Don't get me wrong, I love my work as a State employee, however contributing as a CT gave new meaning to my life. It not only gave me a deeper sense of humility - it also reaffirmed my belief to keep fighting for the eradication of healthcare disparities and to end human suffering."

- State Employee Redirected to a local health department in CA -

*As of 12/4/20

