



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

Happy New Year, Everyone!

As the ball drops in Times Square, it's common for many of us to both reflect on the year that was and contemplate what's to come. It goes without saying that our reflections on 2020 are going to be unique, to put it politely! And while the past year has been a source of challenge on so many fronts, I'm choosing instead to focus on how our fight against COVID-19 has shone a light on the responsiveness, selflessness, and resilience of our state workforce. Nobody expected last January that they would be uprooted from the familiar and asked to take a crucial role in tracing and slowing the spread of a novel infection, but you've all risen to the challenge with a level of grace and willingness to sacrifice for the greater good that still leaves me in awe.



While there's nothing inherently magical about pinning a new calendar to our walls, there is no shortage of reasons to find new hope in the new year. The development of an effective vaccine (two, in fact - with more on the horizon) and its swift deployment has brought the light at the end of the tunnel that much closer. Like a grueling marathon, the first 25 miles can feel like they may never end. But as you round the corner and catch sight of the finish line it's easy to forget just how far you've come. We've turned that corner, and now we just need to maintain our pace and let our current momentum do the rest.

I hope that 2021 finds each of you healthy, rejuvenated, and ready to forge ahead. Your work is critical, and the job you've done so far has been nothing short of tremendous. Thank you for all of your amazing hard work all that you'll continue to do to protect the safety of Californians.

Here's to new hope in 2021! (And **Good Riddance**, 2020!)

-Holly Howard

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

Thank you!

Training Updates

VTA Introduces New Cultural Humility Module

The Virtual Training Academy is excited to begin offering a new, short course for Contact Tracers and Case Investigators who have completed their basic training. This new module will teach staff about the tenets of cultural humility, along with how to apply principles of cultural humility in order to engage respectfully and effectively with contacts.

Course content will include:

- Defining "cultural humility"
- Implicit bias, impacts, and responses
- Effective communication
- Motivational interviewing
- Building collaborative relationships
- Advocacy skills
- And more!



Keep an eye out for registration links coming soon!



Save the Date

Jan. 11: VTA Classic Course -Learn the ins and outs of what it takes to work as a Case Investigator or Contact Tracer. [Register here.](#)

Jan. 28: Case Investigation for CT Alumni - Learn basic concepts of COVID-19 epidemiology, specifically as they relate to the duties of case investigators, how to determine the contact elicitation window during a case investigation interview, and identify when to refer individuals or situations to medical, social, or supervisory resources. [Register 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.

Eric Nelson is Saving Lives

Eric Nelson, PhD works in the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office. He has been working for California Connected as Case Investigator.



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

"I had a family member die of COVID 19. It is satisfying to know that when I get COVID 19 people to isolate I am saving lives, and so I am making a difference in the health of our state."

What has been your biggest challenge as a Case Investigator?

"[Investigating] people who can be classified as super spreaders. It is much more common than people realize: Medical professionals who have symptoms of COVID 19 and nevertheless they go to work; Californians who are out of state, get sick, but hide their symptoms and fly home; people in public facing jobs such as retail. It is hard to talk to people who know they are symptomatic, and they don't care enough about others to stay home and isolate. Instead, they go out and potentially infect a lot of other people."

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

Because of how private and confidential our work is, generally I don't tell people that I am a case investigator. The few I have told appreciate the work I am doing. I have been asked "Aren't you afraid of getting COVID-19?" I tell them all of the work is only by telephone so I am not exposed to the cases I am investigating.

What has been your biggest personal challenge during the pandemic?

"I am disappointed when I am out in public and I see people refusing to wear a mask. They don't understand that many people who get COVID 19 never develop symptoms; yet, they can still infect others. We work so hard to get people to quarantine or isolate, and then there are those people who don't care and may well be spreading the virus by refusing to wear a mask and socially distance. It can be discouraging."

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

"I love opera and live plays. I really want to start going to these again. I also miss visiting friends and family."

Elaine Lister is Greatly Humbled

Elaine is an Audit Analyst with the Department of Public Health. She has been working for California Connected as a Contact Tracer.



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

"I have learned so much from my experience and it has truly been a journey of humility. My understanding of how important it is to meet someone where they are has grown exponentially. To come to the table with an unconditional respect for an individual and allow their cultural values to inform my work has truly been an invaluable lesson."

What has been your biggest challenge as a Contact Tracer?

"Navigating the CalConnect platform! I say that tongue in cheek, however, it is a very intricate system that does so much. It was a little intimidating in the beginning and is a bit idiosyncratic so it took some time for us to become friends."

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

"My immediate family understands and really supports my current assignment. Because my family was personally affected by COVID-19 there is a quiet veneration as they understand firsthand the significance of being supported and informed which is what I do. When my 91 year old mother was hospitalized with COVID-19 earlier in the year, we relied heavily upon the hospital staff to care for and comfort her when she was there alone. The amazing staff who provided care inspires me in my work to be a support to those individuals and families who are affected by COVID-19. For my family's part we recently held a virtual 91st birthday celebration for my Mom via Zoom! It was great because family from across the country joined in and were able to share in loving on and celebrating my mother. She even received a Certificate of Recognition from the City of Pomona in celebration of her 91st birthday, being a retired longtime city employee, and a COVID-19 survivor!"

What has been your biggest personal challenge during the pandemic?

"Probably modeling hope and positivity; conveying the sentiment that things will get back to normal and passing on an attitude of resilience and togetherness. Challenging... but worth the effort."

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

"I look forward to attending the large family/friends gatherings, traveling, celebrations, graduations, parties and weddings! Yes, wedding cake!"

Mikan Gosuico Makes a Difference

Mikan Gosuico is an employee at the California Department of Fish & Wildlife. While deployed to Los Angeles County she encountered a particular set of cases that reaffirmed the importance of the work being carried out by the California Connected COVID-19 Contact Tracing Program:



"I had two cases who were a married couple. The husband had mild symptoms and was isolating alone in a separate bedroom. The wife was asymptomatic and was isolating except for taking care of two young children and preparing food for the family. Both the husband and wife were very receptive to my call and interview and they had several questions for me. The wife was very concerned about how to safely care for her young children. We talked about wearing an N-95 mask while close to the children, while bathing them, etc. and sanitizing the shared bathroom and frequently touched surfaces. The husband had serious concerns about his employer sharing information with his co-workers and the negative consequences of that. The employer is requiring two negative tests before he can return to work. This concerns him greatly because he really needs to return to work as soon as he can in order to provide for his family and he doesn't want to damage the relationship with his employer by seeking legal recourse if prevented to return after his isolation period.

I did some research then called him back, encouraging him to seek assistance from the DPH Call Center if he runs into issues with not testing negative by the time he's ready to end isolation and return to work. When I called him he had one more question for me; he was sad about his wife and the burden she was carrying in taking care of the family while she had also tested positive and the fear that comes along with all of it. The couple hadn't been in the same room since they both received their test results and he wanted to know if it would be safe to give her a hug to comfort her. I told him since they were both already positive it would be ok to go ahead and give his wife a hug. I encouraged them to comfort and support each other through this difficult time. He was so happy and grateful to hear that. In a few days I'll be calling them back for the interim interview for their children. I look forward to hearing how this family is doing. **I feel like I made a difference with this family."**

We Want to Get to Know You!

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

Why Be a Case Investigator?

Currently, Local Health Departments are in dire need of Case Investigators, so we are reaching out to all redirected staff who have not taken the Case Investigator Training, to sign up as soon as possible. This job is under the contact tracing effort and allows you to further your active listening and motivational interviewing skills. The Virtual Training Academy offers this added training on Thursdays, every other week. If you are currently working as a contact tracer and would like to become a case investigator, please let your CT Supervisor know and he/she can assist you to sign up for training. Here is a special message from one of our seasoned Case Investigators who works throughout the State, providing mentorship to our redirected state staff:

“If nothing we do matters, then all that matters is what we do.”

I’m not exactly sure where I heard that quote, but it has always resonated with me. I have been a disease investigator for most of my professional life. Most of the time, it feels like an uphill battle. As if, in the grand scheme of things, I couldn’t possibly make a difference. Not everyone is willing to let me help them. Not everyone is ready. But for that one person, the one who answers the phone cautiously, the one who lets me explain who I am and why I am calling, the one who listens and asks, the one who cries and laughs, the one who says, “thank you.” Well, I made a difference to that one. And that’s all that matters to me. Find your words. Use your voice. Make a difference.



Being a COVID-19 Case Investigator or Contact Tracer is probably unlike anything you ever expected to see yourself doing. During these unprecedented times, your role is vital to the state of California and vital to the people we serve. Some days will feel easy and fulfilling. Others will feel long and emotionally draining. Know that you are not alone. If you need additional support, guidance, or encouragement regarding how to perform case investigation interviews, have your supervisor reach out to us at CIMentoring@cdph.ca.gov. We are a team of seasoned disease investigators who collectively have over 70 years of experience performing communicable disease case investigation activities. We’ve done the work. We’ve made the calls. We know what you are going through, and we are happy help you be successful in your new role.

Jae Egan

Jae Egan

Case Investigation/Contact Tracing Mentorship Team

In Case You Missed It

Dee Gavcus Wins DFPI Commissioner's Award

The California Department of Financial Protection and Innovation Commissioner's Award recognizes outstanding job performance, superior customer service, and service to the Department. The award was recently given to Contact Tracer Dolores "Dee" Gavcus for her excellence, dedication, and contribution to improving state government. Congratulations, Dee!



Governor Newsom Hosts Virtual Conversation with Dr. Anthony Fauci

On December 30, California governor Gavin Newsom hosted a video conversation with Dr. Anthony Fauci, the Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. The two covered a wide variety of topics, including contact tracing, herd immunity, vaccine distribution, and more. [Click here to view the full 30 minute discussion.](#)

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:

[Release Update](#) - Review this video to learn about the latest updates to the CalCONNECT platform, including feature enhancements, new entry fields, and permissions updates

[SPOT for Outbreak Investigators](#) - Learn about key functionality available to Outbreak Investigators when working with the School/Shared Portal for Outbreak Tracking (SPOT).

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

