



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

Case investigation and contact tracing (CICT) are not new concepts; they are proven methods for containing many infectious diseases. But what we have created and been able to accomplish in the last two years with these tools is unprecedented. CICT efforts had never been scaled to this level before in California or the U.S., and most of us came to our roles in the CICT program knowing very little, if anything, about these public health strategies. There was a huge learning curve, and we constantly had to shift with the evolving pandemic and growing scientific understanding, and throughout it all we were supporting people during their most frightening and stressful moments.



We knew very little about the virus, especially in the earliest months, but we were determined to make a difference to slow the spread and keep our communities safe as best as we were able. CICT has been a critical tool for interrupting chains of infection, especially during that first year when we had few other tools at our disposal. During the Winter surge between late November 2020 and late January 2021, we saw some of the worst COVID-19 had to offer and gave the fight the best that we are made of. The Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) has released a new study showing the estimated number of cases and hospitalizations averted by CICT programs in the US at this time. The hard work and dedication of CICT staff, including you, averted 1.11 to 1.36 million cases and 27,231 to 33,527 hospitalizations over the most impacted 60 days of that Winter '20-'21 surge and played a critical role in curtailing the pandemic. This reported data reflected a sample of 23 federally funded CICT programs, like ours. A national review indicates that as many as 56,000 CICT's (per month) interviewed 9.1 million cases and identified 10.7 million contacts during this time-period. The work we are doing has been extremely important to our communities and our state, and even though the speed of transmission with the newest variants reduces our capacity to interrupt transmission with the impact we had previously there are still critical priority areas and disproportionately affected communities that benefit greatly from our support. California will continue improving our program model with our new California Department of Public Health (CDPH) Reserve Corp.



State staff can continue the impact you are making by volunteering for the program or inviting people you know to sign up as well. Use the link below to apply:

<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/HRB/Pages/Public-Health-Reserve-Corps.aspx>

Watch this informative video to learn more:

<https://youtu.be/2gQOrYiXsXw>

As Director of the California Connected Program, I want to thank all of you for helping make our program the success that it is, and for your continued support and devotion to the communities you are serving.

Warmly, Holly Howard
Contact Tracing Program Director

Updates and Resources



ARE YOU TRANSITIONING BACK TO YOUR HOME DEPARTMENT?

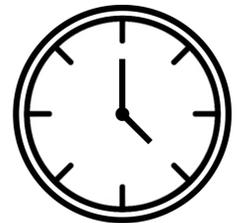
Many of you may be returning to your home departments soon or have recently done so. It's a good idea to take some time to de-stress. Give your body time to rest and your mind time to process all that you've been doing these past months or year, for many of you. Make a game plan for regular self care. We have many resources to help with this, including CalHOPE.

<https://www.calhope.org/pages/gameplan.aspx>

We also have some excellent resources for you through this constantly updated link for Offboarding Staff.

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1---](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1---Txx3bt309EyDHD13h4DA3eujT7QgfEtfHdqFynKc/edit)

[Txx3bt309EyDHD13h4DA3eujT7QgfEtfHdqFynKc/edit](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1---Txx3bt309EyDHD13h4DA3eujT7QgfEtfHdqFynKc/edit)



CT/CI Program Timekeeping Portal

PLEASE make sure you fill out your timesheet by the end of each month or right before you leave the program!

Portal link: <https://cdphcontacttracers.powerappsportals.us/>

- Register for the portal using the registration link in your invite email
- Navigate to the Survey tab and complete all of the information requested
- Select current month and enter actual time worked for the CT program and document any time off taken
- Submit the completed CT timesheet on the last day of the pay period
- Your CT Supervisor will review and approve your time entries
- Remember to also submit a timesheet to your HD Supervisor, according to your HD procedures
- A copy of your approved CT timesheet will be sent to your HD Supervisor as a reference for approving your HD timesheet.

Portal support can be reached at the [Help and Support Page](#) or ContactTracingPortalSupport@cdph.ca.gov

Training Updates

****All Trainings or Courses Must Be Approved By Your CT Supervisor Prior To Registering/Attendance****



Cultural Humility for Case Investigation and Contact Tracing (VTA)

May 9-10 (9am-1pm) **Pre-registration required

A 12-hour course, for staff that have already completed CT or CI VTA. Learn the tenets of cultural humility and how to apply them towards respectful and effective engagement of COVID-19 cases and contacts during investigation and tracing interviews. After your CT Supervisor approves your training attendance, register here: <https://pandemic.ucsf.edu/cultural-humility>

Virtual Training Academy (VTA) Vaccine Communications for Case Investigators and Contact Tracers : April 26 (9-1pm) May 11 or 24 (9-1pm)

****Pre-registration required**

Audience/Who Should Register: Local Health Jurisdiction (LHJ) and state employees who will be working in the area of COVID-19 vaccine outreach and communication.

Length of Course: 3 hours of online self-study and 4 hours (one half day) of live webinars and skill development activities. The online self-study must be completed before coming to the live training.

Learning Objectives:

- Provide accurate and non-judgmental answers to frequently asked questions about the safety, benefits, and availability of COVID-19 vaccines.
- Describe barriers to vaccination and facilitators of vaccination, especially among communities most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Apply principles of health coaching, motivational interviewing, and cultural humility to support people with their decision-making around if, when, and how to get vaccinated.

Language Offerings: The course is offered in both English and Spanish.

Records of Completion: Learners must complete and pass the knowledge assessment with a minimum score of 70% to receive a record of completion.

For more information or to register: <https://pandemic.ucsf.edu/vaccine-communications>

****LHJ and CT Sup Approval Required for Enrollment****

Program Staff Spotlights

This month we are spotlighting staff from the California Connected Contact Tracing Program and CT/CI's who are working with an Local Health Jurisdiction (LHJ) to learn a little more about them and what it's meant to be part of such an important effort.

Kiera Melton is looking forward to traveling with family again.

Before joining CDPH as a contractor with the CDC Foundation, I was working for CDC at the San Francisco Quarantine Station inside of the San Francisco International Airport. I have an MPH with a concentration in Epidemiology from Oregon State University.

Currently, I am working for the Data Management Team, whose role is to keep track of all the data associated with staff working in the contact tracing program. Additionally, we support other workstreams by creating reports and monitoring the Contact Tracing Portal Support inbox.



What have you enjoyed during your experience working with the California Connected Contact Tracing Program?

I have enjoyed working with all the different people and teams in the program. Everyone has been so welcoming and willing to help each other. I have also enjoyed learning more about Microsoft Dynamics (MSD) and how it can be used to support the program!

What has been your biggest challenge so far?

The biggest challenge so far has been learning MSD and adjusting to working from home. Before joining the program, I had no experience working with MSD and I spent the first few weeks learning the ins and outs of the system as part of the Data Management team. I spent most of the pandemic working on-site and it was an adjustment to move to being remote all the time.

What have your family and friends thought of your important work with the Program?

My friends and family are very supportive of the work I am doing. My family has been my biggest support system during the pandemic, and I don't know what I would do without them. Many of my friends also work in public health and we have supported each other during different stages of the pandemic. I truly appreciate all the support they provide and hearing about their journeys through the pandemic.

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

I am looking forward to traveling again once things are back to normal. Before the pandemic I used to travel with my family once a year and I look forward to continuing that tradition going forward.

Program Staff Spotlights

Felipe Olalde learned to keep on his toes during this pandemic.

I am a Program Specialist with the CDPH CID Office of Binational Border Health which I have been a part of for the last 7 years. I was redirected in May of 2020 and currently am part of the Workforce Expansion Redirects Team.



What have you enjoyed while working with the California Connected Contact Tracing Program?

I have really enjoyed being part of Workforce Expansion team and all my teammates, the new experiences I have encountered and learned from my teammates will serve me back in my home department when I return. With this program, I learned to really keep on my toes when it came to doing my work because of the ever-changing environment of the pandemic.

What has been your biggest challenge so far?

My calm personality has been up to the task to manage multiple email inboxes, that at one time were receiving hundreds of inquiries a day, my biggest challenge is making sure I respond providing as much current and correct information to an inbox inquiry as possible.

What have your friends and family thought about your important work with the Program?

My family and friends have been supportive of my work and are impressed with what the State has been able to accomplish through the CaConnected Contact Tracing program in reducing the numbers of COVID 19 cases. Our hard work has been reflected on how California's numbers have dropped dramatically.

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

Potlucks! My home office has some of the most awesome multi-ethnic potlucks. Food makes the world go round!

Staff Spotlights

Ryan Owens looks forward to Global Progression.

My initial fieldwork experience in the response to COVID-19 began in February 2020. I was physically deployed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to their quarantine station in San Francisco, where I helped to support medical officers screen incoming passengers from countries with a level three risk assessment. After successful completion of my two-year fellowship with the CDC, I joined with CDC Foundation in August 2020 to serve as a Senior Public Health Advisor by leading a diverse group of disease investigators of the Disease Investigation Unit (DIU) within the Contract Tracing (CT) Program's Workforce Development.



What have you enjoyed during your experience working with the California Connected Contact Tracing Program?

The success of virtual deployment is what I enjoyed the most. Virtual deployments are measured not always by the impacts made within the number of communities served, but also by the lessons learned from each experience. Each county within the state of California has their own unique set of challenges. However, with the support of a skilled DIU Team in conjunction with other multi-disciplinary work streams, collectively, the CT Program has been able to better serve the priority needs of local health jurisdictions.

What has been your biggest challenge so far?

Although working remotely has its own luxuries, I do miss the ability to connect with each one of my staff on an interpersonal level that is nonvirtual. For example, I have a handful of staff that are not only located within different regions of the state, but also working remotely from other parts of the country. However, despite this ongoing challenge, if physical residence was required, I would not have had the opportunity to build the DIU with this diverse group of disease investigators.

What have your friends and family thought about your important work with the Program?

I laugh at this now, but for a while I was called the "CDC" and no longer by first name as I became the go to for all COVID-19 related questions. And at times some of the questions received were completely outside of my scope of practice that required redirection but, overall, let me know that they respected and believed in the work I do and the work of others during this response targeted to keep individuals and their families safe.

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

I hope to see global progression moving forward as opposed to longing for the "normal" that once existed prior to the pandemic. There have been many lessons learned from COVID-19 that has changed so many lives but, more specific to my field, I look forward to seeing positive growth within the public health infrastructure, so that underserved populations both domestically and internationally can be better served to further promote health and wellness.

We Heard It Through The Grapevine.....

Enjoy Some Great CI/CT Stories Shared From the Field



Helping With More Than Just COVID.....

Our LHJ reached out to us regarding a Spanish-speaking family of 6 (2 parents, 4 school children) who had tested positive 6 days prior but had been attending school. We were requested to reinforce I&Q guidance and ask the parents to communicate with the schools. When the CI called, she found that the children had actually tested positive 14 days prior and had isolated before testing for a second time with a PCR test. Their mother had not been aware of the second positives due to delays in test results. The CI provided guidance on antigen vs. PCR tests as well as on isolation, and obtained the requested exposure info for the schools. The next day, the mother called our CI back to inquire about rental assistance. Her address was eligible for CA COVID-19 Rent Relief so we were able to refer her to resources for that option

For Your Information.....

CDPH COVID-19 Webpage

Here's everything you'd ever want to know about COVID-19 in California:

<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/COVID-19/CovidDataAndTools.aspx>

Have a question or concern about your contact tracing/case investigation work? Do not hesitate to reach out to CTSupervisors@cdph.ca.gov for confidential concerns

In Case You Missed It

BY THE NUMBERS AS OF 04/26/2022

Stats & Figures About
the Contact Tracing Program

241 TOTAL NUMBER
DEPLOYED

104 REDIRECTED STAFF

137 CDC FOUNDATION
STAFF

23 DEPLOYED TO AN
LHJ

23 COUNTIES WITH
DEPLOYED STAFF

COUNTY WITH THE
MOST DEPLOYED
STAFF:

Sacramento (31)

COUNTY WITH THE LEAST
DEPLOYED STAFF:

**Berkley, Amador,
Solano, Siskiyou &
Plumas (3)**



Keeping Our Families and Communities Healthy

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

Stressed Out? Let's "Bird"!

Did you know that April is Stress Awareness Month? One way to relieve stress and anxiety, improve mood, and boost feelings of happiness and wellbeing is by spending time in nature, specifically through the fun activity of "birding!" In this article, we are going to share what birding is, how to participate, and ways it can relieve life's everyday stressors.

What is Birding?

Birding is the observing of birds, either as a recreational activity or as a form of citizen science.¹ It's an all-encompassing and open activity where individuals can enjoy the challenge of bird study, identification, or other general activities involving bird life.

Where Can I Bird?

Wherever birds exist (anywhere)! Birding can take place while on your local neighborhood walk, a visit to your corner park, at a state park, or even from your apartment balcony.

What Will I Need to Bird?

- Bird Guide (book or mobile identification app, ex. Merlin Bird ID by Cornell Lab)
 - Binoculars (optional)
 - A positive, curious, observant attitude!
- Presence and patience will be a huge aid in birding.

Here's a photo from Theresa Majeski, Senior Public Health Advisor/Workforce Coordinator with CA Connected. This photo was taken from Theresa's living room window and features an Anna's Hummingbird (*Calypte anna*)!



What Are the Benefits of Birding?

One of the added benefits of birding is the exposure to nature. Time in nature has been linked to a host of benefits, including improved attention, lower stress, better mood, reduced risk of psychiatric disorders and even upticks in empathy and cooperation.² According to research featured in Bio-Science, a person's experience of seeing a higher number of birds outdoors can be linked to a decrease in their depression, stress, and anxiety.³

So, what are you waiting for? This Spring give birding a try to aid in relieving life's stressors. You never know, you might really "flock" to this new hobby!

Resources:

- 1.<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Birdwatching>
- 2.<https://www.apa.org/monitor/2020/04/nurtured-nature>
- 3.<https://academic.oup.com/bioscience/article/67/2/147/2900179>