



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

This month, we are combining August and September, due to the increased workload on program staff who produce this newsletter. I know we were all hoping to see the trends going down and things getting back to a sense of normal but with the new Delta Variant, we find ourselves scrambling again to get ahead of it. Despite the fact that a small number of vaccinated people can get infected and transmit it, it is still the unvaccinated population that pose the highest risk. We are striving to promote vaccination and encourage everyone to get vaccinated. Now with the Pfizer vaccine formally approved by the FDA, you can view updates from the CDC concerning it here [CDC MEDIA TELEBRIEFING: Update on COVID-19](#).



As Contact Tracers are seeing surges in certain areas, we understand that you may be worried about post-vaccination infections (PVI's) in terms of quarantine guidelines and perhaps risk to ourselves if we're vaccinated, the increased numbers of cases are most likely related to increased transmission of the Delta Variant among the unvaccinated, but we need to be aware of post-vaccination infections as well. The Delta Variant is much more contagious than the other strains and no vaccine is 100% effective, so we really need to make sure people understand how important it is to be vaccinated. We are also seeing mask mandates being enforced in some areas as a precaution and a way to slow the spread, but the best thing will be to keep following the safe guidelines and encouraging those around you to get vaccinated. We cannot stress this enough.



There are resources out there that we can use and share, and we ask that you do so every chance you get. [MyTurn](#) and the [CDC Vaccine Finder](#) are still great resources. Also, for those of you who are vaccinated in CA, you can now upload your vaccine on <https://myvaccinerecord.cdph.ca.gov> More and more restaurants, businesses, events, etc... will require this, so check it out! Thank you again, for all you do and we cannot thank you enough for your hard work and dedication to get California back to normal.

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>

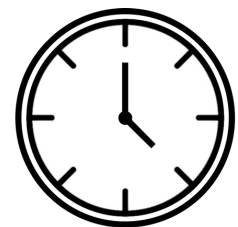
We also have some excellent resources for you through this constantly updated link for Offboarding Staff.

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1---Txx3bt309EyDHD13h4DA3eujT7QgfEtfHdqFynKc/edit>

You will also receive an email to attend the **NEW! Offboarding, Appreciation, and Decompression Sessions** once you return to your home department. (See our session description above in Training Updates, Page 2.)

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 and Mentorship Summits Must Be Approved By Your CT Supervisor Prior To Registering/Attendance****

Offboarding, Appreciation, and Decompression Sessions

1st & 3rd Friday Each Month - 3:00pm - 4:30pm

September 3rd & 17th

We take this opportunity each week to acknowledge and thank the offboarding State redirected staff, hear about their experiences as CIs, CTs, or CTSs, and discuss their thoughts and feelings about returning to their home units. You will receive a Zoom link to attend this special meeting after you've received your notice of your last day. For more information, or if you have not received the link, please email CIMentoring@cdph.ca.gov.



Mentorship Real Talk: A Peer-to-Peer Sharing Session

September 21st, 1:00 - 2:00pm - Scheduled as needed.

The CI/CT Mentorship Team hosts a weekly session to provide a platform for staff to discuss hot topics related to Covid-19 case investigation and contact tracing activities. At least three discussion topics are available each week. Topics rotate based on popularity, availability, and relevance.

Contact CIMentoring@cdph.ca.gov for more information

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

Virtual Training Academy (VTA) Vaccine Communications for Case

Investigators and Contact Tracers is a 4-hour online course conducted through Zoom for staff that are currently performing or will be performing vaccine coordination related activities. The live webinar will focus on interactive, small group activities. In order to maximize in-class time, ~2 hours of self-study is required prior to training. This course will teach staff how to..

- Provide concise and engaging answers to frequently asked questions about the safety, efficacy, availability, and access to COVID-19 vaccines.
- Identify individual and community-level barriers and enablers of vaccination, especially among communities most impacted by the pandemic.
- Apply principles of health coaching, motivational interviewing, and cultural humility to support individuals through different stages of vaccine acceptance, readiness, and action planning.
- Schedule vaccine appointments or provide education on how to schedule vaccine appointments using "My Turn" or other appointment systems.

Upcoming Dates: **September 13, September 14 (Spanish), September 27**

Supervisors will be receiving registration links to share with staff. Please check with your supervisor if you are interested in attending this course.

****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/CIs 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.

Therlanda Singleton makes sure county needs are met.

I started working for the State 17 years ago (my, how time flies!) as a Worker's Compensation Analyst for State Fund and currently work for the Department of Health Care Services as a Drug Rebate Analyst in the Pharmacy Benefits Division. Currently, in my redirected role, I am a Local Health Jurisdiction (LHJ) Alignment Team Liaison for Sacramento, San Bernardino, Mendocino, Lake, Alameda and Yolo counties under the Contact Tracing Workforce Expansion Workstream. We provide ongoing county support and facilitate collaboration with LHJ's and state teams to ensure successful onboarding of state staff as contact tracers/case investigators/supervisors and ensure county needs are met.



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

I am happy that I can say I assisted California in reducing and stopping the spread of COVID. I enjoy meeting co-workers from different agencies and classifications while working towards a common goal. It's also inspiring working with a group with phenomenal women and in an environment with women leaders.

What has been your biggest challenge so far?

The most challenging situation is speaking with contacts and indexes that have lost a loved one, afraid of losing a loved one or have children ill with COVID.

What have your family and friends thought of your important work during this time?

My family is glad that someone in our family is able to participate in such important work.

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

I work in a small department, so I am looking forward to reconnecting with my coworkers.

Program Staff Spotlights

Angenette Inocencio feels a sense of community.

For 11 years, I have been an Investigator under CDPH, Food and Drug Branch, Tobacco Enforcement Section. As an Investigator, I conduct undercover operations with decoys in compliance with the STAKE Act (Stop Tobacco Access to Kids Enforcement). In the summer of 2020, I volunteered to be redirected to the Contact Tracing Program. I felt a call to duty as a public servant to help our communities during this unpredictable time. I also hoped my degree and 17 years of experience in Public Health, made me a good fit for the assignment. From September 2020 through June 2021, I was redirected as a Case Investigator for Stanislaus County Health Services Agency and continue this work with Siskiyou County Public Health Department.



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

Comradery. There was (IS) tremendous effort and coordination behind the COVID-19 response. I felt blessed with Colleagues and Supervisors who have been so supportive along the way. There were undoubtedly bumps in the road, but the sense of community I felt...I knew I was not alone. I also want to mention the California Connected Community of Practice. The transparency, exchange of knowledge, ongoing education and stress busters were profound. This reassignment was/is, by no means, easy. But these Teams reminded me of the importance of the work and this moment, and to know we are all heroes (be it unsung).

What has been your biggest challenge so far?

There were some big ones. Adapting to change, especially during surges of cases. Local health jurisdictions often pivoted efforts or strategies during those times. Also, feeling the sense to help against opposition. I'm sure I was not the only CI/CT who has been hung up on or told to ----- (you can fill in the blank). It was difficult to speak to cases who felt they knew better and had the situation under control (although an entire household of 13 were infected with 1 in the hospital hanging on for dear life). At times, it felt like I was swimming against a riptide. But, most times, I was able to reach calm water with good communication skills and empathy.

What have your friends and family thought about your important work during this time?

I was very fortunate to have my brother as a lifeline; he, too, was redirected as a Case Investigator. Our family felt our work was meaningful yet interesting. My brother said he would share a sort of behind-the-scenes look at contact tracing; taking the stigma out of what the work really entails. As for me, I did get the occasional, "So, what do you think?", or, "What have you heard?" I did not hesitate to share my knowledge.

What are you looking forward to when you return to your home department?

Traveling. I share the sentiment of Nancy Torres-Mancia from the May 2021 newsletter. I have a map, at my desk, that has not had a pin dropped on it for 2 years, sadly. I look forward to traveling to the World Cup 2022 (I have attended the past two). I also look forward to the large watch parties my boyfriend and I hold. I have missed cooking and baking for my family, friends and co-workers...enjoying good food and good company, together, once again.

Staff Spotlights

David Bienstock enjoys making a difference.

I am an IT Specialist I for the Department of State Hospitals at Patton. I have a Computer Science BS degree and a minor in Applied Mathematics from UC Irvine and a MS in Social Administration from Pepperdine University. I am currently assigned to my 3rd LHJ, which is Butte County, as a CI/CT. In my home department, I am a lead and assist the HelpDesk and Enterprise Application Section using database, programming, customer-service, automation and other skills to help hospital staff and contractors ultimately fulfill the role of helping the business run, albeit efficiently and properly, to help the patients for which the Department of State Hospitals is enlisted. I think the CI/CT and Surge-mode atmosphere combined with the dealing with a myriad of people has benefitted me personally and helps/will help my home department as well.



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

Sometimes we feel like we are making a difference, whether it's providing information, resources, helping people go on a flight, getting people to/from vaccination sites, keeping dogs walked during isolation, families safe and paid, etc.

What has been your biggest challenge so far?

Sometimes people aren't willing to give information or help stop a spread, even within their own family.

What have your friends and family thought about your important work during this time?

I am not clinical so I think they wonder how my bedside manner is when the reality is sometimes we have to "get people to do things they don't want to do and/or tell us things they don't want to tell." But it's not like that to me as every person has a story and if they are willing to make the time, we customize every experience to them.

What are you looking forward to when you return to your home department?

I would like to not have to worry about things we cannot control and not be worried about trying to control everything.

We Heard It Through The Grapevine.....

Enjoy Some Great CI/CT Stories Shared From the Field



Knowledgably Dealing with Resistance-Shared by a CI/CT

A CI/CT gave a call to a young female as part of the closed record COVID-19 vaccination scheduling project. The young woman instantly said she was not interested. The CI/CT kindly asked her why, and she explained it was because the vaccinations are so new and were created quickly with little scientific research. The CI/CT responded that she understood her concerns, and that although the COVID-19 vaccine is new, the study of the MRNA (Moderna) vaccines has been done for many years and scientists know a great deal about vaccines, having many others used for decades, and these COVID-19 vaccines were studied in clinical trials to make sure they are effective and safe. The CI/CT also shared that some people do have side effects after vaccination, but overall people have reported positive experiences and they are grateful to now be protected.

After taking time to explain and take more time with the young woman, the CI/CT noticed she started to seem more interested, but still a bit reluctant. She said she would still want to do more research. The CI/CT affirmed that it is important to do research and highly recommend she does more research. "How about I schedule you an appointment and you can do research prior to your vaccination appointment?" The young woman agreed to let the CI/CT schedule an appointment!

Dispelling Myths to Keep Everyone Safe-Shared by a CI/CT

When I began my conversation with my new case last week, I had no idea this would be one of my most rewarding experiences as a case investigator. I began my interview, as I typically do, stating, "I am calling to help answer any questions you may have and to provide helpful information as you navigate through the upcoming days with COVID. Is that ok?" My case, said with a sigh of relief, "I'm so glad because I didn't know what to do." This case had been fully vaccinated and believed it wasn't possible for her to get COVID. So, when her son asked her to babysit her grandson, a positive case, she thought it would be ok. Even when she began to feel sick herself, she felt obligated to continue to care for him and not isolate. During our call, I could hear the child in the background. More pronounced, I heard the stress in my case's voice as she juggled handling the call with caring for the small child. I explained the urgency for her to have her grandson picked up, so she could begin to isolate. She expressed relief knowing what to do and agreed. Following up with my case, I was glad to hear she adhered to the guidance and was recovering nicely. Empowered with the right information, my case confidently isolated and handled the situation while keeping the community and her household members safe.

As my Case Investigator assignment draws closer to an end, this is what I will miss most. I will miss the many heartfelt conversations I've had with so many people. I am so grateful for this experience, the training, and teamwork. I will leave here with an elevated sense of purpose, enriched with great pride, knowing I made a difference and was able to help.

In Case You Missed It

BY THE NUMBERS AS OF 8/29/2021

Stats & Figures About
the Contact Tracing Program

525 REDIRECTED STAFF

507 DEPLOYED STAFF
TO AN LHJ

8 COUNTIES WITH
DEPLOYED STAFF

COUNTY WITH THE
MOST DEPLOYED
STAFF:

Los Angeles (276)

COUNTY WITH THE
LEAST DEPLOYED
STAFF:

Tuolumne (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

[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](#)**.

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>

Shift Changes

With the current state of COVID-19 surges, some state staff may be requested by their assigned Local Health Jurisdiction (LHJ) to adjust their work schedules to accommodate the needs of the LHJ. The California Connected Program has always been resilient since its inception and we are confident the program will thrive with these changes. We have asked the LHJs to modify the work schedules of their internal staff to meet their business needs *prior* to asking state staff to modify their schedules. If the LHJ is reaching out for schedule changes, it is because they need it to handle the rising number in cases and state staff will be provided advanced notification consistent the requirements of their bargaining unit contracts. Thank you for your cooperation, if asked to adjust your schedule!

CT Testimonial

During my time as a Contact Tracer, it was my personal goal to maintain a high work ethic in speaking to the citizens of California and to maintain a healthy work relationship with my peers. I have found that in performing great service you also gain a sense of accomplishment, feel proud of the work you've done, and often motivate your other team members. When you feel a sense of accomplishment, you naturally become more engaged in your work, and more motivated to maintain and improve your good work. The proof of this was when my team was no longer needed for a county. We performed our job to a high degree doing our part to lower the number of cases. I believe that feeling a sense of achievement is a key cornerstone of creating a productive work environment: without being able to feel a sense of accomplishment, there's little to motivate people to go that extra mile. Keep up the great work California Connected!

***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***