

October 23, 2020

Re: Definition of “Close Contact” Revised by CDC

On Wednesday, October 21, 2020, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued new guidance, expanding the definition of who is a “close contact” of an individual infected with COVID-19.

Previously, the CDC defined a “close contact” as someone who spent at least 15 *consecutive* minutes within six (6) feet of a confirmed coronavirus case. The updated guidance now defines a close contact as someone who was within six (6) feet of an infected individual (or individuals) for a **total of 15 minutes** or more over a 24-hour period.

Specifically, the CDC definition of “close contact” now states:¹

Close Contact

Someone who was within 6 feet of an infected person for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period* starting from 2 days before illness onset (or, for asymptomatic patients, 2 days prior to test specimen collection) until the time the patient is isolated.

** Individual exposures added together over a 24-hour period (e.g., three 5-minute exposures for a total of 15 minutes). Data are limited, making it difficult to precisely define “close contact;” however, 15 cumulative minutes of exposure at a distance of 6 feet or less can be used as an operational definition for contact investigation. Factors to consider when defining close contact include proximity (closer distance likely increases exposure risk), the duration of exposure (longer exposure time likely increases exposure risk), whether the infected individual has symptoms (the period around onset of symptoms is associated with the highest levels of viral shedding), if the infected person was likely to generate respiratory aerosols (e.g., was coughing, singing, shouting), and other environmental factors (crowding, adequacy of ventilation, whether exposure was indoors or outdoors). Because the general public has not received training on proper selection and use of respiratory PPE, such as an N95, the determination of close contact should generally be made irrespective of whether the contact was wearing respiratory PPE. At this time, differential determination of close contact for those using fabric face coverings is not recommended.*

¹ CDC: Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), Contact Tracing, Appendices, Updated Oct. 21, 2020, available at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/contact-tracing/contact-tracing-plan/appendix.html#contact> (last visited Oct. 23, 2020).