

Media Release

The Hon Jenny Mikakos MLA

Minister for the Coordination of Health and Human Services – COVID-19

Deputy Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Minister for Health

Minister for Ambulance Services



Saturday, 4 April 2020

MORE DISEASE DETECTIVES TO HELP FIGHT CORONAVIRUS

The Victorian Government has 1000 people working-around-the-clock on the public health response to coronavirus in Victoria, working on our contact tracing effort.

Minister for Health Jenny Mikakos said the work of public health support staff to track and trace cases was vital to flattening the curve of the disease in Victoria and saving lives.

The contact tracing team includes many roles such as epidemiologists, public health clinicians, logistics, phone operators and data entry staff – all who support the central task of case and contact tracing. The team, which was already in place trace the close contacts of diseases such as measles, has grown rapidly – from a team of 57.

It's supported by the Government's \$37 million investment to increase surveillance, allowing for more targeted case identification, contact tracing, isolation advice and confirmation of individuals who are no longer infectious.

Contact tracing allows 'close contacts' of a person who may have coronavirus to be identified and then isolated or quarantined to limit the spread of the disease. Close contact means anyone who has been within a 1.5 metre space for more than 15 minutes, such as having a cup of coffee with a friend or being in an enclosed space.

The team is working 24-hours a day calling people who have been diagnosed with coronavirus to determine where people have been and who they've been in contact with, to ensure all close contacts are found and people receive the advice they need.

The team has implemented a new contact system to send daily messages to close contacts of confirmed cases and recently returned travelers. Using an Australian based system called Whispir and Victorians receiving the messaging will need to confirm they are still in quarantine, their condition and status of test results.

Close contacts and returned travelers who are not isolating will be flagged by the system and then followed up.

The contact tracing team will continue to grow, with the search continuing for people with a range of skills needed to support the work. People new to the team will be provided training and appropriate safety measures in place.

Without the actions currently been undertaken by contact tracers and other healthcare workers, coronavirus would spread more quickly, the health system would be under greater pressure and more people would die.

In addition to the contract tracers, the Government has launched an expression of interest for retired health professionals and students which has already had over 6,000 responses.

For the latest information and advice on coronavirus visit dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus.

Quotes attributable to Minister for Health Jenny Mikakos

"As community transmissions rise, contact tracers are more important than ever – their work is saving lives."

"Contact tracers and their support teams are vital to our coronavirus response – their behind-the-scenes work means people are able to self-isolate as quickly as possible and we are able to slow the spread of this disease."

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