

Concept Note

Online global consultation on Contact Tracing for COVID-19

1. Background

Contact tracing is central to a comprehensive preparedness and response for the COVID-19 pandemic and should be a key component of all national COVID-19 control strategies. Contact tracing contributes to slowing down transmission of the virus by helping to break chains of human-to-human transmission and ensuring that the number of new cases generated by each confirmed case is maintained below one.

As such, contact tracing is crucial for managing COVID-19 outbreaks without the need for stringent wide-scale public health and social measures.¹ In countries that have implemented wide-scale stringent measures, the implementation of contact tracing should be part of a strategy for adjusting the measures. As the epidemiology of the pandemic develops across the world, robust contact tracing will be a core component in managing further/additional waves of infection.

Expanding contact tracing capacity encompasses many elements including scale-up, implementation and sustainability plans at the national and sub-national levels; training for contact tracers and supervisors; risk communication and community engagement; real-time information management; new digital tools and approaches to augment contact tracing; extended analysis and special studies of contact networks and disease transmission; and monitoring and evaluation methodologies.

It is important to consider how these elements are appropriately adapted for COVID-19.

This consultation will discuss how to urgently scale-up implementation of the contact tracing activities, including harnessing technology for contact tracing at the scale necessary for the COVID-19 pandemic.

Expected outcomes:

- An agreed description of what is contact tracing for COVID-19
- A clear articulation of all the different components of contact tracing that need to be considered by national authorities
- Advocacy for contact tracing, and strengthened coordination and collaboration on contact tracing
- A joint workplan with prioritized areas, a lead for each area, and deliverables particularly for next 3 months.

2. Current context, including multiple technology initiatives.

¹ WHO. Overview of public health and social measures in the context of COVID-19.

<https://www.who.int/publications-detail/overview-of-public-health-and-social-measures-in-the-context-of-covid-19>

- WHO, partners and stakeholders have been supporting countries on contact tracing as part of Strategic Preparedness and Response Plans, and to implement IHR Emergency Committee Recommendations.
- Additional strategic commitment, advocacy, and investment is urgently needed to strengthen activities and rapidly scale up of both public health and community contact tracing capacity.
- WHO is to continue to support countries and partners by providing technical and operational guidance, training platforms, and tools such as Go.Data, to enhance case identification and contact tracing capacity, strengthen the public health workforce, and engage communities for contact tracing.
- An increasing number of countries, and COVID-19 partners, are developing guidelines for contact tracing and have extensive experience of successes and practical challenges. Key enabling factors for contact tracing are public health capacity, trust, and community engagement. Privacy, efficacy, and ethical considerations may have significant impact on public trust.
- Traditional public health contact tracing, and innovation in self-reporting/apps for proximity alerts, could bring specific and complementary capabilities.
- Increased commitments and coordination are needed to maximise progress on practical and technical guidance, share training materials and approaches, work together to train a contact tracing workforce, and support the roll-out of Go.Data.

3. Virtual global consultation

WHO will convene an online consultation to provide a global forum to discuss contact tracing for COVID-19; to share technical and operational experience on contact tracing activities, including innovations in digital technology in operational planning, training, use of Go.Data and other tools.

The aim is to identify practical opportunities for stakeholders and partners to build capacity and capability through both traditional and innovative contact tracing approaches.

The objectives of the consultation will be:

- To provide support and advice to countries for strengthening contact tracing.
- To review practical experience of contact tracing operations with selected countries and partners and identify successes, challenges, and urgent needs.
- To review recent developments in the potential use of digital technology to strengthen capacity for contact tracing.
- To strengthen coordination and facilitate collaboration and networking among partners and stakeholders on contact tracing for COVID-19.