



MARYLAND COVID-19 CONTACT TRACING

NORC deploys its data collection and public health expertise to identify and notify contacts of Marylanders who have tested positive for COVID-19.

Breaking the Chain of Infection

During a pandemic, contact tracing—identifying people whom a person with a contagious disease may have infected and sharing appropriate care and self-isolation information with them—is an essential part of breaking the chain of infection. That’s why Maryland Governor Larry Hogan made contact tracing an essential component of “Maryland Strong,” his administration’s plan to carefully re-open the state after its COVID-19 stay-at-home order.

But launching a contact tracing program with the necessary speed and thoroughness requires one thing that most state and municipal health departments lack—a ready staff of skilled contact tracers and a large-scale calling capacity that will allow the effort to hit the ground running. NORC’s data collection and public health expertise—and our state-of-the-art telephone interviewing infrastructure—made us an ideal contact tracing partner for Maryland.

“Maryland wanted an experienced partner who could rapidly deploy a technically sophisticated solution. It’s the first instance I’m aware of a state hiring a firm like NORC for contact tracing that can apply the best practices of a large-scale data collection to an urgent public health response.”

—David Cotton, PhD
Project Director and Vice President
of NORC Public Health

IMPACT

NORC's contact tracers will quadruple Maryland's existing COVID-19 surveillance capacity.

Our contact tracer recruiting efforts yielded more than 750 candidates in the first 72 hours. NORC's contact tracing will be an important pillar in Maryland's COVID-19 recovery plan, which also includes expanded testing capacity, increased hospital surge capacity, and increased supply of personal protective equipment.

NORC's Outreach and Public Health Experience

NORC has been conducting large, interview-based health projects throughout its history. From 2015 to 2020, we completed more than three million hours of interviews. A significant portion of those interviews were in support of the [National Immunization Survey](#), a major health surveillance study that NORC conducts for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. NORC's other large-scale public health data collections include the [Medicare Current Beneficiary Survey](#), which NORC conducts for the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, and the [National Social Life, Health, and Aging Project](#), which NORC conducts with grant funding from the National Institutes of Health.

Many of these studies involve nuanced, carefully scripted conversations about sensitive health issues, and interviewees are often members of underrepresented or difficult-to-reach demographic groups. Through these and similar studies, NORC has derived significant methodological expertise, including how best to deploy and integrate different modes of data collection and the technologies that support them.

Deploying a Thorough, Carefully Managed Tracing Effort

Using lists provided by the Maryland Department of Public Health, NORC contact tracers will call up to 1,000 newly infected residents per day. For each person they call, the contact tracers will:

- Ensure they have the health and social supports they need
- Find out the names and contact information of people with whom they have had close contact
- Notify those contacts of their exposure, check for symptoms of COVID-19, refer them to COVID-19 testing, and provide referrals or resources as appropriate

For each of the newly infected residents we call, we expect to identify and reach out to as many as 10 close contacts, so our call volume will be as high as 11,000 people per day.

In addition, NORC will consult on the integration of technology and telephony, including SMS, email, and integrated voice response. We'll also manage script development, training development, and the recruiting, hiring, and supervision of Maryland-based staff.

START A CONVERSATION

Find out how you can tap into NORC's public health experience and telephone interviewing expertise to meet your contact tracing needs. **Contact Jeffrey Hackett** at Hackett-jeffrey@norc.org or **312-759-4266**.

Explore more of NORC's COVID-related work at covid19.norc.org.