

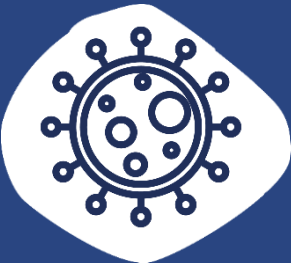
DISEASE INTERVENTION SPECIALISTS AND OUR NATION'S RESPONSE TO COVID-19

Using information gathered from DIS COVID-19 calls organized by NCSD between March and July 2020, NCSD is able to describe how DIS and health departments have adapted contact tracing practices for COVID-19, how priority populations are being reached, and what innovations and collaborations have been fostered by the pandemic.



National Coalition
of STD Directors

COVID-19 Impact



DIS are on the frontlines battling COVID-19 and have emerged as a critical component of the effort to control the pandemic. This unprecedented public health emergency has put a spotlight on the critical and life-saving work done by DIS, who have been an integral part of STD interventions for four decades. As resources and attention are being diverted to COVID-19, STD infections may increase in the absence of adequate screening, testing, and treatment.

Contact Tracing

Due to COVID-19, field visits have been suspended in many states and DIS are conducting contact tracing remotely. DIS who possess strong infectious disease investigative skills and expertise have been leading COVID-19 contact tracing efforts, including supervising and training an influx of volunteer contact tracers from government agencies, universities, and elsewhere. STD programs and DIS across the country are adapting to the escalating number of COVID-19 cases in a variety of ways.



Confidentiality



Confidentiality and data security have emerged as a key concern during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, with DIS and other contact tracers working from home in unprecedented numbers. Many DIS and contact tracers working from home have had challenges finding private spaces for phone calls while also ensuring those they are calling are in a space where they feel comfortable discussing sensitive health topics.

Health & Wellbeing

The health and well-being of DIS and other health professionals doing COVID-19 contact tracing is a serious concern because they may experience underlying health conditions and field visits include opportunities for COVID-19 exposure. DIS often work seven-day work weeks and 12-hour workdays. Some DIS and contact tracers have also been infected by COVID-19 themselves, or had family members become infected, adding to the stress of their work. In some places this has led to DIS calling in sick or quitting their jobs, resulting in understaffing.



Innovations



In response to COVID-19, new contact tracing training materials, resources, and strategies have been quickly developed and utilized, including contact tracing and telehealth conducted through Zoom, FaceTime, or WhatsApp, instead of face-to-face visits. The crisis has also spurred the rise of innovative and creative practices such as at-home self-collected testing, abbreviated contact tracing online training curriculum, and software that enable DIS to manage contact tracing on a massive scale.