

Contact Tracing in COVID-19: Justifying the Need and Strengthening the Process

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Abstract

The Corona Virus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic continues to rise in terms of its geographical distribution, the number of people infected and the number of people losing their lives due to the resulting complications. Contact tracing is an effective strategy to identify, assess and manage people with a positive history of exposure to a confirmed case, so that we succeed in interrupting the transmission chain and further transmission of infection. It is essential to follow-up the contacts for a period of 2 weeks from the last date of exposure, but the successful implementation of this strategy will depend upon the support of the general population, planning of the entire process after considering the local contexts, trained and adequate number of workforce, logistics, and a supportive mechanism to collect, compile and analyze the data in real-time. In conclusion, the component of contact tracing is a crucial link in interrupting the chain of transmission of the COVID-19. It is the responsibility of the public health authorities and members of the community to work in close collaboration to identify the contacts at the earliest and quarantine them with an aim to prevent onward transmission.

Keywords: Contact tracing, COVID-19 pandemic, world health organization

INTRODUCTION

The Corona Virus Disease 2019 (COVID 19) pandemic continues to rise in terms of its geographical distribution, the number of people infected and the number of people losing their lives due to the resulting complications. As a matter of fact, till date, 14,562,550 cases and 607,781 deaths have been reported in the 216 affected nations and territories which amounts to a case fatality rate of 4.2%.^[1] As the infection is transmitted between humans through close contact or droplets, it is extremely important to break the chain of transmission by ensuring detection and isolation of cases, and tracing and quarantining of all the contacts.^[2]

Contact tracing in COVID-19

Contact tracing is an effective strategy to identify, assess, and manage people with a positive history of exposure to a confirmed case, so that, we succeed in interrupting the transmission chain and further transmission of infection.^[2,3] It is essential to follow up the contacts for a period of 2 weeks from the last date of exposure, but the successful implementation

of this strategy will depend on the support of the general population, planning of the entire process after considering the local contexts, trained and adequate number of workforce, logistics, and a supportive mechanism to collect, compile, and analyze the data in real time.^[3] Moreover, as the recent evidence has suggested that the infection is even transmitted by asymptomatic individuals, the need to strengthen contact tracing deserves immense significance.^[3]

Strengthening contact tracing

The process of contact tracing cannot be comprehensive, unless local communities are engaged in the entire process, not only with regard to helping the workers to trace the contacts, but

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also be ready for daily monitoring, actively report appearance of COVID related symptoms and be prepared to go into quarantine for 2 weeks or isolation (if develop symptoms).^[4,5] In addition, the community can significantly aid in the overall process by not stigmatizing the identified contacts or spreading false information about the disease, so that people themselves come forward to report their signs symptoms and not hide them, as it will result in a cluster of cases.^[4,5] While undertaking contact tracing, we have to define the contacts, which refers to anyone who has been exposed to a COVID-19 case from 2 days before to 14 days subsequent to the development of illness in the case.^[3]

This has to be followed by identification of contacts through interview or filling up of a questionnaire or even by obtaining data with regard to various places of visits. Subsequently, all the contacts need to be contacted and their contact status needs to be confirmed and then they should be explained about the need for contact tracing and quarantine.^[3,4] The contacts should be also informed about the symptoms suggestive of the infection and the steps to be taken (such as informing health authorities, self isolation, the importance of hand, and respiratory hygiene) if they become unwell. The quarantined contacts should be monitored daily for the development of symptoms suggestive of the disease and contacts should also be encouraged for self-reporting. This process of monitoring should end 14 days after the contact was last exposed to the confirmed case.^[4,5]

Role of the health sector

The health sector has to also estimate the number of people who will be required to work as contact tracers based on the stage of transmission of the disease.^[3,6] It has been envisaged that the persons who are involved in contact tracing should not be medical personnel, as there is already a significant shortage of them in meeting the rising needs of the patients. It will be ideal that local residents of the community are given the task of contact tracing after giving them appropriate training and providing them with adequate number of personal protective equipment and other logistics.^[3,6] All the collected information

needs to be collated and analyzed in the real time and provided to the public health authorities to plan their outbreak readiness and emergency public health response.^[3] of contact tracing after giving them appropriate training and providing them with adequate number of personal protective equipment and other logistics.^[3,6] All the collected information needs to be collated and analyzed in the real time and provided to the public health authorities to plan their outbreak readiness and emergency public health response.^[3]

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the component of contact tracing is a crucial link in interrupting the chain of transmission of the COVID-19. It is the responsibility of the public health authorities and members of the community to work in close collaboration to identify the contacts at the earliest and quarantine them with an aim to prevent onward transmission.

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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