



5/14/2020 COVID-19 Updates

No New Cases of COVID-19 in Chautauqua County Today

Chautauqua County statistics:

- 44 confirmed cases;
- 7 active cases - continue to recover under orders of the Local Health Official per NYS Public Health Law;
- 33 recovered cases;
- 4 deaths;
- 142 cases under quarantine/isolation orders by the Public Health Director and being monitored. Not all of those being monitored are confirmed to have COVID-19 but have either shown symptoms, are awaiting results, or have risk factors; and
- 1641 negative test results to date.

CONTACT TRACING IS A LONG-USED PUBLIC HEALTH TOOL

The practice, known as contact tracing, is a tried-and-true core disease control technique. Contact tracing is routinely utilized by public health departments around the country as a key strategy to control outbreaks of infectious diseases; it is used to trace everything from food poisoning to sexually transmitted diseases to respiratory diseases like COVID-19.

“Disease investigation and control are core responsibilities of public health, including this Local Health Department,” said Christine Schuyler, County Director of Health & Human Services. “We are the legal authority for outbreak investigations and we take this responsibility very seriously.”

Contact tracing is a little like detective work. The technique is a “cornerstone” of preventative medicine. Once someone has been confirmed to be infected with a virus, such as through a positive COVID-19 test, trained contact tracers attempt to track down others who have had recent prolonged exposure to that person when they may have been infectious. Typically, that exposure means being within 6 feet of the person for more than 10 minutes.

Trained staff then make an effort to reach out to every one of those contacts. Contacts are provided with education, information, and support to understand their risk, what they should do to separate themselves from

others who are not exposed, monitor themselves for illness, and the possibility that they could spread the infection to others even if they themselves do not feel ill. Identifying contacts and ensuring they do not interact with others is critical to protect communities from further spread. To protect patient privacy, contacts are only informed that they may have been exposed to a person with the infection. They are not told the identity of the person who may have exposed them.

Contact tracing can be a laborious process. Interviewing infectious patients and reaching out to dozens of contacts takes time, patience and good people skills.

Contact tracing COVID-19 infections has proven particularly difficult, as some infected people don't have symptoms, and the period of time between being infected and becoming infectious appears to be relatively short. Contact tracers may have trouble getting in touch with contacts if phone records aren't up to date, or if an infected patient is already too sick to help identify their recent contacts.

Contact tracing is a specialized skill and should only be performed as part of a coordinated initiative led by the appropriate public health authority.

"In addition to core County public health staff who already are trained and experienced in disease investigation and contact tracing, additional DHHS staff are being trained in contact tracing per NYSDOH guidance," said Schuyler. "Our staff capacity to perform contact tracing exceeds the metrics set by Governor Cuomo."

DHHS has developed a plan that fully utilizes the strengths of the Department workforce given current limitations on the ability for some to fully engage in usual work activities.

"We have built in the ability to rotate staff performing the duties of community specialists, contact tracers and clerical support under the supervision of public health nurses as needed now and if we get a surge of cases once Chautauqua County reopens," said Schuyler. "I have also been directed by the NYSDOH that in the case of a surge, we still have the option of requesting an additional team to be deployed from the NYSDOH."

The County is not hiring additional staff but the NYSDOH is hiring contact tracers, team supervisors to lead a team of contact tracers, and community support specialists. This is a NYSDOH initiative to help keep New Yorkers safe and stop the spread of COVID-19. Information and applications for all three NYS Contact Tracing positions are online: <https://coronavirus.health.ny.gov/get-involved-how-you-can-help>

Chautauqua County Government continues to have a variety of resources available for individuals to stay informed of the County's statistics and updates for COVID-19. Daily updates are available by 5 p.m. each day on:

- Chautauqua County's website at chqgov.com by clicking on "COVID-19 Information" on the home page.
- Chautauqua County Health Department Facebook page at www.facebook.com/myhealthycounty/
- Chautauqua County Government Facebook page at www.facebook.com/chautauquacountygovernment
- Emailed directly to individuals who are signed-up to receive the County Executive's "Monday Memo" newsletter. To sign-up, go to chqgov.com and under the County Executive's page sign up under the Monday Memo Newsletters tab.
- Chautauqua County Public Health COVID-19 Hotline-- Individuals can hear the daily update of COVID-19 cases in Chautauqua County by calling the Hotline at 866-604-6789 and selecting option 6.

Link to Chautauqua County COVID-19 Map:

<https://chautauquacounty.maps.arcgis.com/apps/opsdashboard/index.html#/012d07321ad6415c8cf17c4f673643c9>

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