

**For Release Day 5/29/2020 7:50AM**

## **County of Berks / COVID-19 Leadership Team Alert**

*Berks County Contact Tracing Beginning June 8<sup>th</sup>*

*It will be voluntary, confidential, and culturally appropriate*

**Reading, PA— 5/29/2020** — The County of Berks is pleased to announce a twelve-month agreement with Co-County Wellness Services (CCWS) to provide contact tracing to assist in identifying people who might have had direct contact with a person diagnosed positive for COVID-19.

### **Slowing the Spread of COVID-19 with Voluntary Interviews**

Starting the week of June 8<sup>th</sup>, CCWS will expand the capacity of the state health department contact tracers reaching out to those who have had close contact with COVID-19 infected patients. The purpose of these interviews is to identify potentially exposed individuals and instruct them to take appropriate action based on the person's symptoms and medical history. Each identified positive case has an average of ten contacts and each contact interview takes about 30 minutes of time to complete. **All aspects of the case investigation and contact tracing will be voluntary, confidential, and culturally appropriate.** Contact tracers will conduct one-on-one telephone interviews with patients and will protect patient privacy when reaching out to potentially exposed individuals. **No digital tracking applications will be utilized.**

Contact tracing is a tried-and-true practice that has been previously used in Berks County. CCWS, formed in 1985, has used this process over the last 19 years in conjunction with the PA Department of Health (DOH) to identify and notify partners of individuals diagnosed with sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). CCWS has a long-standing relationship with the DOH and

will coordinate contact tracing with DOH. CCWS registered nurses, trained educators, and Deputy Director Barbara Waller, will provide training, oversight and clinical support to the volunteers and paid tracers. All tracers will be required to register with SERVPA and undergo a background check and clearance from DOH.

### **Contact Tracing is Vital as Berks Moves to Reopen**

Berks County will move into the “Yellow Phase” on June 5, lifting some restrictions for businesses and social interactions. It’s critical for health officials to stay ahead of the disease as residents begin to venture out, heading off possible resurgence in positive case numbers.

*“The Berks County Commissioners are pleased to engage the services and leadership of CCWS as we continue to monitor the impact of COVID-19 and we strive to provide increased testing, tracing and PPE with the support of our community partners until there is a proven vaccine. We strive to ‘Do Our Part to Stop the Spread!’”*— Commissioner Kevin Barnhardt.

The county and CCWS especially want to thank the many community partners offering paid and volunteer support and in-kind services; United Way of Berks County, The Berks County Community Foundation, the Wyomissing Foundation, Dr. Debra L. Powell, Chief, Section of Infectious Diseases Tower Health Medical Group and CCWS Clinic Director/Board Member, Berks Community Health Center, Reading Hospital, Penn State Health St. Joseph Medical Center, Daniel Egusquiza, Barrio Alegria, and the local colleges and universities.

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**For more information, press only:**

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