



The newsletter for Redirected State Staff working for the California Connected COVID-19 Contact Tracing Program

A Message from Holly Howard

As we begin the second month of 2021, give yourself permission to appreciate the strength you all have shown in weathering the tidal wave of the case surge these the last few months. Take a moment to breathe and be still. Allow yourself to give in to the feelings of optimism bubbling under the surface as we witness the steady decline in case numbers; the projected increased capacity in our hospital Intensive Care Units; and, most excitingly, the growing availability of vaccinations, which are becoming more and more readily available across the State.



I am confident that while we take this moment to catch our breath and appreciate all that has been overcome and accomplished during the last year, we are equipping ourselves with the certainty that we will be able to face the trepidation that lies before us as we learn more about the new variant strains that are being identified and how their spread may affect the pandemic, our communities, and our work.

There are challenges ahead, but I encourage you to choose to embrace hope every day. Remember that while we may not be able to physically come together to work, we are not doing this alone. That knowledge may help to make challenges, like new requests to pivot to an interim period of vaccination support duties, seem manageable.

I am inspired by everyone in this program; by the steadfast work being done by each of you to help ensure the safety of the people of California.



With appreciation,

-Holly Howard

Contact Tracing Program Director

How are we doing? Let us know how we can improve this newsletter by completing our [survey here](#). Thank you!

Training Updates

****All Trainings and Mentorship Summits Must Be Approved By Your CT Supervisor Prior To Registering/Attendance****



March 1-3, and 15-17 and 29-31: VTA: Cultural Humility for Case Investigation and Contact Tracing. A 12-hour course (9am-1pm), for staff that have already completed CT or CI VTA. Learn the tenets of cultural humility and how to apply them towards respectful and effective engagement of COVID-19 cases and contacts during investigation and tracing interviews. After your CT Supervisor approves your training attendance, register here: <https://pandemic.ucsf.edu/cultural-humility>

Feb. 16 and 26: Mentorship Summits for Recently Deployed CIs/CTs. Get guidance and support while learning interviewing tips and tricks. Register via CIMentoring@cdph.ca.gov

Feb. 23: CalCONNECT Foundations 2.0

A 90-minute webinar (1-2:30pm), for Case Investigators and Contact Tracers who need a refresher on core functionality of the CalCONNECT platform. To register, CI/CTs should contact their CT Supervisor, who can direct all requests to their respective LHD POC at least 2 days prior to the training.

Mentorship Summits for Recently Deployed CIs/CTs.

Each Tuesday from 2:30pm-4:00pm, the CI/CT Mentorship Team will host a summit to provide guidance and support to CIs/CTs who have recently been deployed to assist with the State's COVID-19 efforts.

The format is a facilitated, free-flowing, unscripted conversation between staff and our team of experienced disease investigators on the tips, tricks, and challenges of conducting Case Investigation and Contact Tracing activities. Summits focus entirely on disease investigation/conducting the interview and will NOT provide guidance on CalCONNECT/data systems, HR, or deployment concerns.

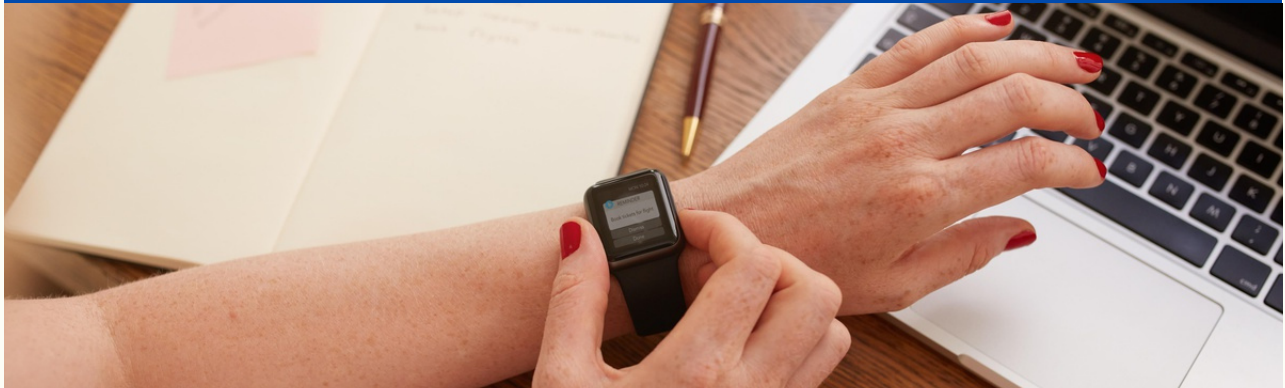
We strive to provide a safe space where staff feel comfortable expressing their thoughts, feelings and anxieties without fear of ridicule or repercussion. Therefore, we kindly ask that managers/supervisors/team leads NOT attend this session.

These summits are **limited to staff deployed within the last 30 days**. Additional mentorship opportunities are available for individual teams and more experienced staff.

- Please note that these sessions are optional
- **CT Supervisor approval is required prior to registration.**
- Registration is required.
- Space is limited. Please *only* register if you plan to attend, and cancel if your plans change.

For more information, please contact CIMentoring@cdph.ca.gov.

Technology Updates



Are CalCONNECT and the California Connected Portal the same thing?

The answer is "No." **CalCONNECT** is the data management system that Contact Tracers/Case Investigators use to call (through a softphone) and document their COVID-19 cases.

The California Connected Portal is a database used for all redirected state staff to use to update their profile and now to use for timekeeping of their hours as a Contact Tracer/Case Investigator. (More Info Below)

Contact Tracing/Case Investigator Portal is **LIVE** in California Connected

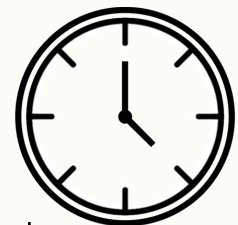
California Connected has launched a new timekeeping portal to streamline the time reporting process for our redirected staff. All entries and approvals will be completed within the portal, and once timesheets have been approved they will be automatically sent to home department supervisors. Select the link below to the new Contact Tracing Program timekeeping portal. FAQs, job aids, and portal assistance contact information can be found here.

CT/CI Program Timekeeping Portal

Now you can enter timesheets electronically!

Portal link: <https://cdphcontacttracers.powerappsportals.us/>

- Register for the portal using the registration link in your invite email
- Navigate to the Survey tab and complete all of the information requested
- Select current month and enter actual time worked for the CT program and document any time off taken
- Submit the completed CT timesheet on the last day of the pay period
- Your CT Supervisor will review and approve your time entries
- Remember to also submit a timesheet to your HD Supervisor, according to your HD procedures
- A copy of your approved CT timesheet will be sent to your HD Supervisor as a reference for approving your HD timesheet.



Portal support can be reached at the [Help and Support](#) Page or
ContactTracingPortalSupport@cdph.ca.gov



Staff Spotlights

We reached out to redirected staff to get a better idea about their experiences working with the California Connected Contact Tracing Program. Each month we'd like to highlight their responses, and share with you what it means to be part of such an important effort.

Amanda Gutierrez provides peace of mind

Amanda was recently promoted to an AGPA with the California State Lottery Commission, after having been with the State for 7 years. Amanda became a mother 14 years ago and has another one on the way. She enjoys music and hopes to play the Lottery once she's retired. She is currently a Case Investigator for California Connected, assigned to Los Angeles County.



What have you enjoyed during your experience as a Case Investigator?

"We are providing a service either because we volunteered or were voluntold, regardless of how we all came to be, our purpose is far greater. Our Californian neighbors needed us to bring resources when they thought no one cared, piece of mind and an ear during their darkest hour of isolation and most importantly awareness to stop the spread of this extremely contagious virus. It is indeed a taxing role, don't forget we have resources of our own to help cope, we are in this together."

What has been your biggest challenge as a Case Investigator?

"The biggest challenge I faced in the very beginning was learning to adapt to each case call and becoming familiar with the script and CRM. Learning the specifics along the way as things were constantly changing to find a more efficient interview process. Coping and taking time after each call was also difficult during surges as there just isn't enough hours in the day. I still have yet to practice the selfcare I truly need after a taxing day of case calls. However it is necessary regardless of the quantity of your calls, it only takes one call to really drain your energy."

What have your friends and family thought about your work as a Case Investigator?

"Initially my friends and family thought it was pretty cool that I've taken a role to help in this pandemic, it's a new history in the making. Then they realize there are challenges that come with making calls and the awareness becomes very real. It's not anything like our frontline workers, but it's still neat to see (at a distance) what's actually happening in our state."

What are you looking forward to when things get back to normal?

"When things go back to normal I'm going to hug each member of my family first. Enjoy a good delicious potluck with friends and confidently get back to my gym routine. As for work, I'm hoping I get to see all of my Lottery family again."

Staff Spotlights

Jose Gonzalez is practicing resilience

Jose manages a team responsible for surveying, investigating, and enforcing health care facilities' compliance with State and Federal licensing and certification requirements. He was temporarily assigned to California Connected Contact Tracing (CT) Department of Public Health Program since June 2020 as the CT Supervisor of state redirected staff virtually deployed to Imperial County.



What have you enjoyed during your experience as a Contact Tracing Supervisor?

"The new connections and friends made from this CT Assignment. I have had the opportunity to meet with various people who live in various parts throughout the state of California. These people come from different backgrounds and with many talents. Collectively, we have all contributed to the common goal to help disrupt the spread of COVID-19 in our community and at our assigned LHJ. More importantly, it is heartening to know that we are doing our part to protect humanity."

What has been your biggest challenge as a Contact Tracing Supervisor?

"The CTS assignment does not require a lot of physical strength; however, this role has demanded a strong mental, spiritual and emotional foundation. This role has called me to be resilient and guide others while learning the best way to navigate through constantly changing information. I have met these challenges by staying focused on our mission and not be disappointed with the spikes and surges of positive cases. Remaining hopeful that our efforts will continue to provide favorable results. I have also overcome challenges by finding methods to clear my mind and de-stress. Being constantly surrounded with COVID information, I have found the importance of putting away my electrical devices, going on morning walks, listening to music, and stepping away from work in order to come back regenerated."

What have your friends and family thought about your work as a Contact Tracing Supervisor?

"My family has provided me with the greatest support throughout my CT Assignment. During these times, it can be difficult to determine what information is accurate and how to discern that it is from a reliable resource. I have become a liaison of information for my family and friends. Disinformation about Covid-19 can cause a lot of fear and anxiety and knowledge from trusted resources can ease those feelings."

What are you looking forward to when things get back to normal?

"I look forward to being able to get together with Family and Friends. Although virtual calls and messages have helped me stay connected with them, I have missed having their personal presence, sharing laughs, and enjoying good meals together. I am also looking forward to returning to our favorite vacation destinations with my family... ☒ the white sandy beaches of Hawaii ☒"

Staff Spotlights

Tony Zeng appreciates the Language Line

Tony is an Air Resources Engineer with the California Air Resources Board. He has been working for California Connected since August as a Contact Tracer and two months ago became a Case Investigator, assigned to Kings County.



What have you enjoyed during your experience as a Contact Tracer?

"I have enjoyed learning all about COVID-19 and being able to do my part to help in this pandemic. Before this opportunity came I was speaking with others about how I wanted to do something to help and once it came I volunteered despite not having any kind of background in public health and epidemiology. Doing Contact Tracing has really helped strengthen my skills with speaking to strangers on the phone and adapting to an ever changing environment."

What has been your biggest challenge as a Contact Tracer?

"One of the challenges has been speaking to people when I don't speak the language and using the language line for assistance. I am really glad that resource exists and despite it making my calls a bit longer it has helped me to better conduct interviews and get people the resources they need and information they are seeking."

What have your friends and family thought about your work as a Case Investigator?

"They are always asking me questions about how the work is and what I do. I also have had a few family members get infected with COVID so they come ask me for information and what to do in terms of isolation and quarantine. Most thank me for what I'm doing and know that we get a lot of flak from the public and press so it's nice to be supported and know that plenty of people support me in the work I'm doing as a Contact Tracer."

What are you looking forward to when things get back to normal?

"I am looking forward to being able to have large gatherings with friends and family to celebrate special occasions (i.e. birthdays, holidays, graduations) and I also participate in a recreational paddling sport called Dragon Boat which is a team sport with anywhere from 10-20 people in a boat next to each other but with the pandemic and social distancing that has been paused as like many other sport activities. So let's do our best to beat this virus and return back to some of the things we all love to do."

In Case You Missed It

BY THE NUMBERS AS OF 2/8/2021

Stats & Figures About
the Contact Tracing Program

2,581

REDIRECTED STAFF

2,214

DEPLOYED STAFF TO
AN LHJ

38

COUNTIES WITH
DEPLOYED STAFF

COUNTY WITH THE
MOST DEPLOYED
STAFF:

Los Angeles (1,001)

COUNTY WITH THE
LEAST DEPLOYED
STAFF:

Inyo (4)



Keeping Our Families and Communities Healthy



What if I'm COVID-positive?

Many of you are making calls to contacts or to those who are first hearing that they are COVID-positive. You are walking them through the process of what to do and assisting them through all the protocols provided by the local health department you've been assigned to. But what should you do if you are exposed to someone who is COVID-positive, or you've been diagnosed with COVID-19? Here is a [link](#), provided by CalHR, with guidance for State employees on what to do if you are exposed or recently had a COVID-positive test:

[https://www.calhr.ca.gov/Pages/covid-19-updates-for-state-workers.aspx#:~:text=If%20an%20employee%20has%20tested,Sick%20Leave%20Act%20\(EPSLA\).](https://www.calhr.ca.gov/Pages/covid-19-updates-for-state-workers.aspx#:~:text=If%20an%20employee%20has%20tested,Sick%20Leave%20Act%20(EPSLA).)

Tools & Resources

California Connected is dedicated to outfitting redirected staff with the tools they need and the training to use those tools effectively. Some examples include:

[Release Update](#) - Review this video to learn about the latest updates to the CalCONNECT platform, including feature enhancements, new entry fields, and permissions updates

[SPOT for Outbreak Investigators](#) - Learn about key functionality available to Outbreak Investigators when working with the School/Shared Portal for Outbreak Tracking (SPOT).

Find more great information and tutorials on the [CDPH CalCONNECT Learning YouTube playlist here.](#)

