



Keeping Our Families and Communities Healthy

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

A Guest Blog by Rita Wong

I am honored to have been invited to write a guest blog for the February/March edition of your California Connected newsletter! First, I want to express what great pride I feel for the important and sometimes very difficult work that you all perform each day; then I would like to share a little information about our newly launched Public Health Reserve Corps program.



I can honestly say that I have been so impressed by all of your continued strength and commitment to the roles you not only accepted, but ultimately embraced as your calling to help our fellow Californians. I personally have never felt more pride than I do right now being involved in such a critically important mission. I feel an abundance of pride even just referring to myself as a public servant; pride in the incredible efficiency shown by our leaders and program support; and I take great pride when I share the details of “a day in the life” of our contact tracing program. I brag about your monumental accomplishments and enjoy bringing to light all the different skills you have developed as part of this effort. **Because of YOU, we can take a more proactive approach to emergency response!**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, you were mission tasked by the Office of Emergency Services under the direction of the Governor’s office to be redirected to serve as Contact Tracers, Case Investigators, Vaccine Coordinators and so much more. You accepted this responsibility with such devotion and it is due to your tireless efforts that the California Connected program has been a such huge success - so huge, that we were approved to launch an ongoing voluntary Public Health Reserve Corps (PHRC) program. The PHRC grew its roots from the response efforts you helped design for the California Connected program. Similar training and program infrastructure has been developed for PHRC, and you can take pride in knowing that you helped launch this new program that will allow trained staff to be activated rapidly for emergency response in the future. Reserve Corps volunteers will remain working with their home state agencies until activated, and activations are limited to no more than 90 days for a single deployment, and no more than twice in a year.



During the periods between deployments, volunteers will remain abreast of all emergency service support happenings via quarterly Community of Practice refresher sessions. The PHRC is the first program of its kind here in our state and has been developed thoughtfully to better equip and rapidly respond to emergencies by utilizing volunteers from all state agencies who choose to participate.

If you or someone you know is interested in applying for PHRC, details can be found here: <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/HRB/Pages/Public-Health-Reserve-Corps.aspx>

Warmly, Rita Wong
 Manager, Contact Tracing Workforce
 Expansion

Updates and Resources



The CDPH Reserve Corp Wants You!!

Love what you do and want to continue helping in the future? Know another state employee who might be interested in volunteering to help? We encourage everyone to check out the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) Reserve Corps. With this new program, CDPH is seeking state employee volunteers to serve on trained strike teams that will provide emergency response support in the case of a state of emergency in the State of California that poses a risk to the public health.

If you are currently working with us as a part of the CAConnected Contact Tracing Program, you can still apply and it won't impact your current deployment. Feel free to share this information with others and enjoy this informative video developed to showcase why being a part of the Reserve Corps is such important work:

•**Recruitment Video:** <https://youtu.be/2gQOrYiXsXw>

•**Program Details on our Website:**

<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/HRB/Pages/Public-Health-Reserve-Corps.aspx>

•**Where to apply:**

<https://cdphcontacttracers.powerappsportals.us/PHReserveCorpsApplication/>

Offboarding, Appreciation, and Decompression Sessions

March 24th, 28th or 29th, 3:00pm - 4:30pm

We take this opportunity each week to acknowledge and thank the offboarding State redirected staff, hear about their experiences as CIs, CTs, or CTS', and discuss their thoughts and feelings about returning to their home units. **You will receive a meeting request to attend this special meeting after you've received your notice of your last day**

Are You Transitioning Back to Your Home Department??

Many of you may be returning to your home departments soon or have recently done so. It's a good idea to take some time to de-stress. Give your body time to rest and your mind time to process all that you've been doing these past months or year, for many of you. Make a game plan for regular self care. We have many resources to help with this, including CalHOPE.

<https://www.calhope.org/pages/gameplan.aspx>

We also have some excellent resources for you through this constantly updated link for Offboarding Staff. [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1---](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1---Txx3bt309EyDHD13h4DA3eujT7QgfEtfHdqFynKc/edit)

[Txx3bt309EyDHD13h4DA3eujT7QgfEtfHdqFynKc/edit](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1---Txx3bt309EyDHD13h4DA3eujT7QgfEtfHdqFynKc/edit)

Training Updates

****All Trainings or Courses Must Be Approved By Your CT Supervisor Prior To Registering/Attendance****



***Mandatory* Information Privacy & Security Training Refresher**

Required for all State Staff, DIU Teams, and CI Schools Teams: 30 minute video

Available at: www.wearecaconnected.com

COVID-19 Response Resources

- Resources for You
 - Information Privacy & Security Training

There is a completion certificate also available on the website that you must download, digitally sign, and email to CTTrainingDev@cdph.ca.gov

Certification Needed by 5:00pm Monday, March 14, 2022

Cultural Humility for Case Investigation and Contact Tracing (VTA)

April 11-12 (9am-1pm) **Pre-registration required

A 12-hour course, 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>

Virtual Training Academy (VTA) Vaccine Communications for Case Investigators and Contact Tracers: March 22 (9-1pm) April 13 or 26 (9-1pm) **Pre-registration required

Audience/Who Should Register: Local Health Jurisdiction (LHJ) and state employees who will be working in the area of COVID-19 vaccine outreach and communication.

Length of Course: 3 hours of online self-study and 4 hours (one half day) of live webinars and skill development activities. The online self-study must be completed before coming to the live training.

Learning Objectives:

- Provide accurate and non-judgmental answers to frequently asked questions about the safety, benefits, and availability of COVID-19 vaccines.
- Describe barriers to vaccination and facilitators of vaccination, especially among communities most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Apply principles of health coaching, motivational interviewing, and cultural humility to support people with their decision-making around if, when, and how to get vaccinated.

Language Offerings: The course is offered in both English and Spanish.

Records of Completion: Learners must complete and pass the knowledge assessment with a minimum score of 70% to receive a record of completion.

For more information or to register: <https://pandemic.ucsf.edu/vaccine-communications>

****LHJ and CT Sup Approval Required for Enrollment****

Program Staff Spotlights

This month we are spotlighting staff from the California Connected Contact Tracing Program and CT/CI's who are working with an Local Health Jurisdiction (LHJ) to learn a little more about them and what it's meant to be part of such an important effort.

Diya Azzam gets strong support from family and friends.

My name is Diya Azzam. Engineer with the California Department of Transportation for the past 14 years. Since June 2020 I have been working as a Case Investigator in Contact Tracing. At first, we did not know what to expect but as the day, week, month goes by, I felt lucky to be a part of this serving the communities in California. Waking up everyday knowing that we are saving lives by guiding and assisting our communities in contact tracing is a blessing."



What have you enjoyed while working as a CI/CT?

My experience at CI/CT has been tremendous, especially dealing with local communities in Santa Clara and now at Humboldt County. We will look back after COVID with pride that we were part of a great state team that assisted in every possible way to stop the spreading of this virus.

What has been your biggest challenge so far?

Is by far Vaccination and conspiracy theories around the Vaccine. Talking to people who are not convinced they need to get vaccinated ,especially who have comorbid conditions is the toughest part because we really want to protect them and their families.

I see the Vaccine as the first wall shield to our body against COVID19. It will eventually help us reach Herd immunity in our nation and worldwide.

What have your family and friends thought of your important work?

I had a strong support from my family and friends since I joined CI/CT in June 2020. I would receive phone calls regarding quarantine and Isolation all the time.

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

Definitely chatting and sitting with friends whom we haven't been in contact with for a long time.

Program Staff Spotlights

Ashley Simmons finds it challenging but rewarding.

In March of 2020 I left my county position to work for the CDPH, and just 3 months in, I was redirected as a contact tracer around June 2020. Within a couple months, I transitioned to a case investigator and then within weeks began working as a team lead developing processes and training staff to handle outbreaks. Just when I got that under my belt and felt comfortable in that role I was “redirected from my redirection” to join the Admin side of the house in April 2021.



What have you enjoyed while working with the California Connected Contact Tracing Program?

I have enjoyed seeing the COVID response from the inside out and work with a group of amazing staff who sincerely care about protecting the public, and genuinely care about each other. It is a great experience knowing that the job I do has meaning and the people that I work with are competent and structured. Our team is so open to making sure the best information gets out to the public, and to each other, so I have been able to not only trust the guidelines but also glean skills and knowledge. Working with a group of amazingly supportive and knowledgeable people has allowed me to learn a wide range of tasks or functions directly from the people who are working on the guidance that is released to the public.

What has been your biggest challenge so far?

Now that I have done this for a while there are very few challenges that I encounter but the constant changes can be challenging and a gift all in one. Working for the CA Connected CT Program has presented countless learning opportunities. Now, as we are defining processes for the Reserve Corp, I realize the dust never settles for too long and the Admin tasks have shifted any time a staff member joins or leaves the program, so there are constant adjustments or focus changes. Let's just say one could never become bored with this role 😊 I am constantly learning something new – but the challenges that come with that are the largest factors on why I am happy to be a part of this team. As many like to say, we are building the plane as we are flying it, and many processes have not been defined yet. In previous positions it was one thing to step into a role and just work on implementing or improving existing processes. In this role we are defining, and actively monitoring for improvement areas to constantly redefine processes. It is a difference of the usual ‘that is how we have always done it’ versus our ‘how do we envision this working?’. It is an entirely different ball game when you are building a program from the ground up, and while it is challenging it is so rewarding to know that YOU have a hand in the greatness that it becomes. The reward makes it easier to become a bit more adaptable and eager to see what change or hurdle is coming next.

What have your friends and family thought about your important work with the Program?

If I am being honest, and I mean absolutely honest, it has been a mix of feelings and remarks from friends and family. Everyone appreciates the work I am doing, and know that no matter what role I am in that I am an advocate so they feel comfortable when I am able to confirm information or explain guidelines. For many, they often thank me for the work I am doing but on the flip side, it also means I am a sounding board to some for their frustrations, uncertainty or misconceptions surrounding COVID and contact tracing. Those are the most important conversations that I enjoy the most, and that are so important to listen to, because we get to hear first hand the “customer feedback” or the pulse of the community that we serve.

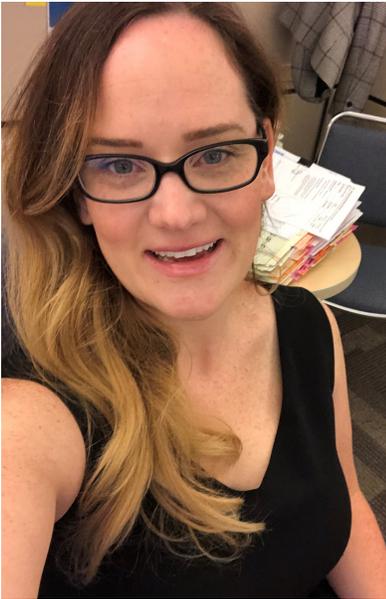
What are you looking forward to when you return to your home department?

I don't want everything to go back to normal! There are certain procedures in place during this protocol that should have been in place a long time ago (oh, I don't know, like washing your hands often or distancing in public, for instance). I remember prior to COVID having to ask people in the checkout line, or the close talker (there is always one in every office), to give me some space and them being offended by it, now it is a requirement. Most people do not realize how simple things like crowding someone in a checkout line (as if it will make the line move faster) were triggers for trauma victims, so I love the 6 foot rule. Most importantly, working from home has been a blessing to me and my family of 7.

Staff Spotlights

Allison Loomis is promoting healing through education.

I am currently an Associate Governmental Programs Analyst (AGPA) with the Department of General Services (DGS). Several years ago, I relocated to Northern California and left behind a corporate career at the Disneyland Resort to pursue public service. In August 2020, I was assigned to the Santa Clara County Department of Public Health as a Contact Tracer. Amid the Delta surge in July 2021, I was redirected to serve as a Case Investigator for Humboldt County. This work has been an excellent opportunity for me to give back to the community through education and resource support to promote healing and to prevent further spread of the virus.



What have you enjoyed during your experience working as a CI/CT?

The deployment with Public Health has provided a dynamic work environment. I encountered countless unpredictable experiences and frequent changes. In addition, I had the opportunity to learn a lot about entirely new subject matters like epidemiology and community resource coordination.

Special thanks to my team and everyone with Public Health; you've made my work feel necessary, valued, and supported every step of the way.

What has been your biggest challenge so far?

The discontinuity of experiencing our lack of preparation for the reality of a pandemic at a global scale confirmed apprehensions that I had long held.

I lived in a chaotic home with substance use and untreated mental illness. I experienced the suffering one endures from avoiding conflict instead of approaching it. With each new variant of the virus and surge of cases, I've felt the discomfort of uncertainty and was challenged to tell the truth, to tell it all, and to tell it first. Frequently the only answer available was, "I don't know." In the absence of answers, I listened, one client at a time and searched for opportunities to promote safety in the community.

What have your friends and family thought about your important work during this time?

Friends and family have observed the strides I've made in my professional growth while working on this project. Furthermore, others have remarked on the lifesaving camaraderie I've provided to members of the public in unexpected ways.

There is a deep sense of responsibility to carry the stories of the people I've met and helped along the way. Speaking honestly about the impact this virus has had in the community is a way to honor the losses and sacrifices and share the lessons learned through this challenge.

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

It's great to keep a balanced perspective that eventually, everything will pass, even a global health crisis. It's been a challenging time, and I've come to understand and appreciate the sense of resilience in my neighbors. I am looking forward to being in tune with the impermanence of life and courageously facing the rest of my days.

We Heard It Through The Grapevine.....

Enjoy Some Great CI/CT Stories Shared From the Field



Be Someone's Reason to Smile...

I understand how COVID-19 can leave people feeling vulnerable. I recall making 1 call outreach attempt to a case that answered right away. She was cooperative in answering all of the interview questions and her answers were not simple and short. This sweet, elderly lady wanted to talk and vent. After speaking with her for a while, I came to find out that she was an elderly widow that had recently lost her husband to COVID-19. She expressed how she was alone, overwhelmed and scared. She mentioned that her husband would always be the one to go out and cut and prepare the firewood for the cold days. She was not able to physically do that herself especially being weak, fatigued and sick from COVID-19. I was able to fill out a resource coordination management form and arrange for county social services as she was cold and needed assistance with staying warm and with food. She expressed how thankful she was for the call and assistance. I find that calling people during this difficult and uncertain time and offering guidance, and sometimes just a listening ear, can help them feel supported, less alone and can humanize the process while providing information and resources to help them safely self-isolate. It is not about just getting and giving isolation and quarantine information, it's also about serving humanity and being the reason someone smiles that day.

Going Beyond Can Really Help...

During the surge I was able to support a family and provide them with resources in the current LHJ I am supporting by going beyond and helping them find a location for testing when it was much more difficult to schedule testing. The case needed testing to prove to their workplace she was indeed positive even after being symptomatic and having a positive at home test result. I was able to help the mother schedule an appointment after refreshing the webpage a couple of times. When I completed the follow up, she was able to confirm her positive test results to her workplace.

In Case You Missed It

BY THE NUMBERS AS OF 03/17/2022

Stats & Figures About
the Contact Tracing Program

251 REDIRECTED STAFF

228 DEPLOYED STAFF
TO AN LHJ

27 COUNTIES WITH
DEPLOYED STAFF

**COUNTY WITH THE
MOST DEPLOYED
STAFF:**

Los Angeles (59)

**COUNTY WITH THE LEAST
DEPLOYED STAFF:**

Shasta (1)



Keeping Our Families and Communities Healthy

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

CDPH COVID-19 Webpage

Here's everything you'd ever want to know about COVID-19 in California:

<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/COVID-19/CovidDataAndTools.aspx>

♥ February is American Heart Month ♥

Now is the time to make an extra effort to focus on our cardiovascular health, as heart disease remains the leading cause of death in the United States and largely preventable.

We would like to highlight hypertension (high blood pressure), which is often called The Silent Killer. You might not have symptoms, but it's a leading risk factor for heart disease and stroke.

One way that we can avoid high blood pressure is to control stress. Research shows that stress can make us more likely to get heart disease and have a heart attack. Finding healthy relaxation exercises is just one way to protect your heart. Combine de-stressing with other heart-healthy habits: eat nutritious foods, move your body more and exercise, get enough sleep, and develop a strong social support system.

Additionally, monitoring your blood pressure at home can alert you that there may be a problem. This can help you keep your blood pressure under control.



For additional resources, tips, and fact sheets regarding heart health, visit the National Institute of Health's National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute ([NHLBI](#)) website.

Have a question or concern about your contact tracing/case investigation work? Do not hesitate to reach out to CTSupervisors@cdph.ca.gov for confidential concerns