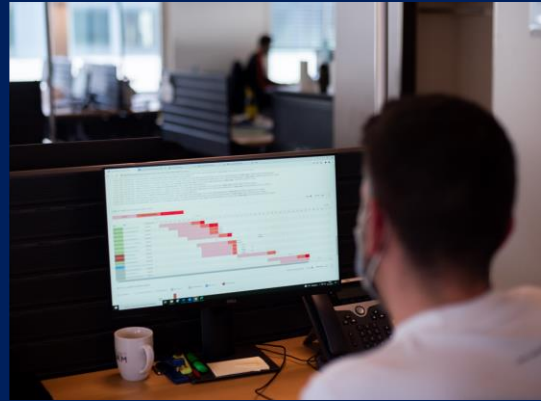


# WHO guideline on contact tracing

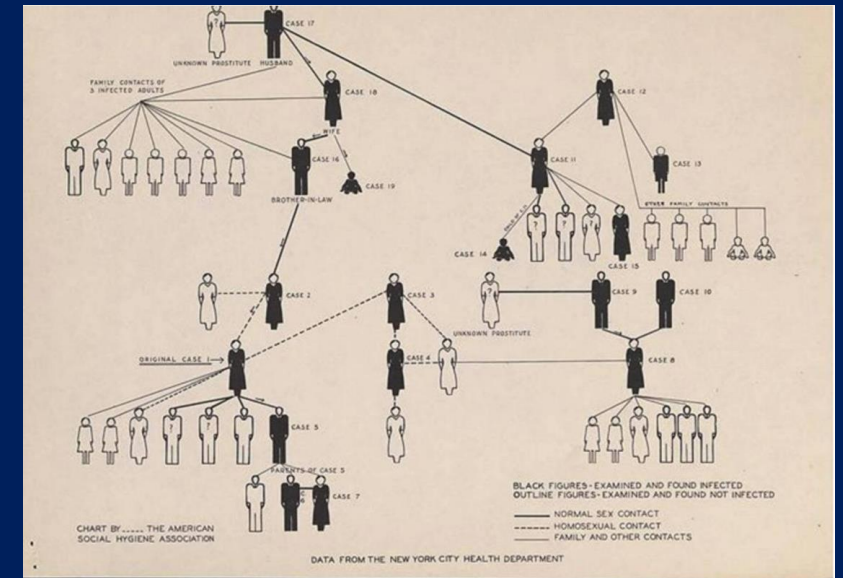


“... if those infected could be identified, isolated, and persuaded to report their contacts, outbreaks could be slowed and, in some instances, stopped.”

Allan M Brandt

Department of Global Health and Social Medicine, Harvard Medical School, Boston, MA

Department of the History of Science, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.



# Background

- Disease specific guidance documents (e.g., Ebola, Measles, TB, SARS, mpox)
- June 2020 – GOARN consultation on contact tracing
  - Clear gap in **established definitions and guidelines** to understand concepts of contact tracing
  - Need for **cohesive definitions** and **categorization** of cases, contacts and risk
  - **Historically no great deal of evidence-based research on contact tracing**



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# Scope and target audience

- **Scope**

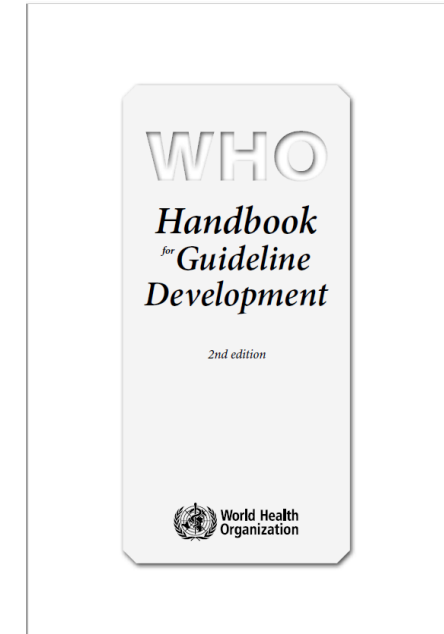
- A “disease agnostic” guideline
- Does not replace existing disease-specific guidelines
- Establishes definitions and concepts

- **Target audience**

- WHO Member States (MS)
- subnational and national disease-specific programs within national public health agencies, ministries of health or government structures
- WHO
- other organizations who may participate in contact tracing implementation or research

# Guideline development process

- [WHO Handbook for guideline development](#)
  - Evidence-based, [GRADE](#) complemented by [WHO-INTEGRATE](#)
  - External independent experts



**Q1-Q2 2023**



WHO Steering group  
Guideline development  
group (GDG)  
Methodologist

**Q3-Q4 2023**



Systematic literature  
review  
GDG workshop

**Q1-Q2 2024**



Writing of guideline

**Q3-Q4 2024**



WHO Guideline Review  
Committee (GRC)  
review, feedback, and  
approval  
Publication (Dec. 2024)

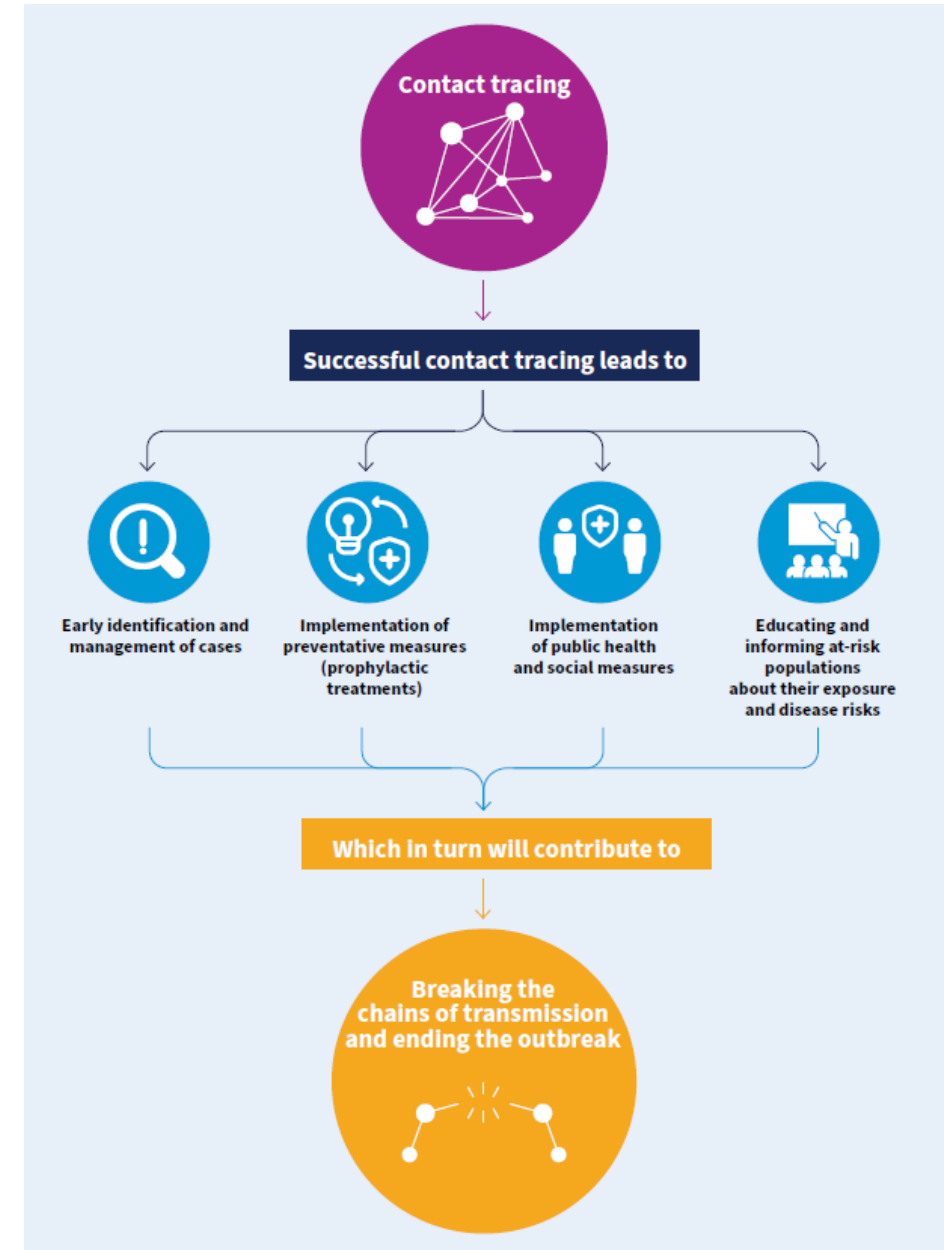
# Objectives of contact tracing

- **Primary/ most common objectives**

- Prevention of new infections by breaking chains of transmission
- Early identification and management of cases
- Implementation of public health and social measures (PHSM) to reduce the spread of infection

- **Other objectives encompass**

- Information of population at risk
- Understanding epidemiological characteristics and transmission dynamics
- Information for PHSM decision making
- Improvement of disease outcomes



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“Contact tracing is defined as: the systematic process of **identifying, assessing, managing, and supporting** contact persons of infectious individuals.”

WHO guideline for contact tracing, 2024



# Steps of contact tracing

## Review the objectives and relevancy of contact tracing:

- Outbreak dynamics
- Performance indicators
- Available resources
- Response needs

## Monitor performance indicators and target values

## Consider surge modalities and scale up options



## Establish the objective of contact tracing

## Develop a contact definition that considers:

- Vulnerable groups/ high-risk contact persons
- Sensitivity and specificity in light of set objective
- When and how to review the contact person definition

## Establish contact identification modalities that consider:

- Connections with case investigation
- Who identifies?
- When?
- Where?
- What happens once a contact person is identified?
- Resource needs

## Establish contact follow up modalities that consider:

- Are they needed?
- Self-monitoring vs externally-led monitoring?
- Duration?
- What happens if the person becomes sick?
- What happens at the end of the follow-up period?
- Resource needs



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# Definitions (1)

## Contact

**an exposure** to an infectious disease that involves **interaction with an infected individual** or contaminated environment **during a given period** and **in a manner that makes transmission likely**, considering the **nature of the disease** and **the context** of the contact.

## Contact person

**someone** who has been exposed to an infectious disease pathogen through direct or indirect contact with an infectious person. Risk of exposure may be determined by taking into consideration the **mode of transmission, time and duration of exposure, distance** from the infectious person, and **stage** of the disease and **severity** of symptoms in that person.

## High-Risk contact person

an individual who may **be more likely to become infectious**, to develop a **severe form of the disease**, or to **infect other individuals**.

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## Definitions (2)

### Contact tracing and case investigation

**Contact tracing is initiated during the process of case investigation.**

Case investigation (including the identification of the origin of the infection and mechanism of transmission) is the essential component of outbreak exploration and forms the foundation of contact tracing efforts but **lies outside the scope of this guideline.**

### About upstream and downstream

The terms “upstream” and “downstream” contact tracing have been used in literature and other guidelines.

WHO does not distinguish between the two, considering **contact tracing to be downstream in its nature and guided by the latent and incubation periods of the pathogen in a given host.**

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# Recommendations

**WHO suggests in favour of intensified contact person identification over non-intensified contact person identification in populations at risk of infectious diseases.**

*(conditional recommendation; very low certainty of evidence)*

**WHO suggests in favour of active follow-up of contact persons over passive follow-up of contact persons in populations at risk of infectious diseases.**

*(conditional recommendation; very low certainty of evidence)*

**WHO suggests that testing be added to contact tracing in comparison to contact tracing alone for contact tracing in populations at risk of infectious diseases.**

*(conditional recommendation; very low certainty of evidence)*

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# Next steps

## Publication and dissemination of the guideline

- Publication in English
- Translation
- Dissemination through WHO and partner networks
- Support to MS

## Development of an implementation guidance (including international contact tracing)

- Technical working group
- Comprehensive review of methods used to identify contact persons
- Comprehensive review of methods used to monitor contact persons
- Comprehensive review of methods used to measure contact tracing strategy performances
- Identification of core set of variables to be used in contact tracing
- Support to MS and partners to adapt to contexts

# Thank you

For more information, please contact:  
Marie-Amélie Degail  
Epidemiologist  
[degailm@who.int](mailto:degailm@who.int)

