

Memorandum

Contact tracing processes to support COVID-19 contacts

Date due to MO:	8 March 2021	Action required by:	N/A
Security level:	IN CONFIDENCE	Health Report number:	20210526
To:	Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister for COVID-19 Response		

Contact for telephone discussion

Name	Position	Telephone
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Action for Private Secretaries

N/A

Date dispatched to MO:

The main issue for me here is timing. When Cabinet is relying on test results to make big decisions there needs to be a much greater sense of urgency.



31/3/21

Contact tracing processes to support COVID-19 contacts

Purpose

1. This report responds to your request for information on the contact tracing processes including the use of Finders Services to support communications with COVID-19 contacts, and the processes undertaken in advance of undertaking physical home visits.

Context

2. The local public health unit (PHU) completes the case investigation of the positive COVID-19 case, and then delegates contacts from outside of the household to the Ministry's National Investigation and Tracing Centre (NITC) to manage.
3. The NITC is responsible for providing advice to these individuals regarding their need to isolate and get tested, dependent on the relevant contact category.
4. The NITC and PHUs have clear processes in place to support communication with contacts to ensure they are provided correct and timely advice as appropriate for their contact category.
5. The performance of the contact tracing service is performing well against the P002 Disease Indicator target. For the period between 14 February and 28 February, 88 percent of close contacts of a positive COVID-19 case were contacted within 48 hours from the time that the PHU was notified of the case.
6. Testing results for the two largest exposure events of the recent outbreak also demonstrates a high level of compliance. As at 8am 8th March, 1543 of the 1549 contacts at Papatoetoe High School have received a negative test result since 22 February 2021, with four contacts having tested positive, one contact having received an initial negative test but refused retesting, and one contact having refused all testing. Of the 1979 contacts associated with Kmart Botany that are required to be tested, only 5 have not returned a negative test result.
7. The NITC utilises external referral pathways, including the associated PHUs and local service providers where additional support is needed to make contact with these contacts.
8. Appendices one and two detail these escalation pathways and associated timeframes for the NITC and Auckland Regional Public Health Service (ARPHS).

Communicating with COVID-19 contacts

Operational processes to support communication with COVID-19 contacts

9. Standard operating procedures are followed by the NITC and call providers to ensure communications reach all identified contacts in a timely manner, so as to reduce the risk of community spread of COVID-19.

10. Before the initial phone call to any contacts, an SMS is sent to advise that the Ministry of Health is attempting to make contact and ask that they please answer their phone.
11. If calls cannot reach contacts due to phone numbers being invalid, these are escalated immediately to Finders Service.
12. If a phone number is active but the contact does not pick up the call, then call attempts are made either six times to a mobile, or four to a landline, over a 24-hour period, with at least one call attempt being out of business hours.
13. If no contact is made within that period, they are referred to the NITC's Finders Service to source additional contact details.
14. The NITC Finders Service utilise internal Ministry of Health data sets, such as the National Health Index, to find updated contact information. As part of the process, if appropriate an email is sent to advise that contact is being attempted and to request additional phone numbers from these individuals.
15. When health databases are unsuccessful in finding additional contact information, the Finders Service engage with external agencies including Police, Customs and Inland Revenue to source further contact details. Once alternate contact details are sourced for this person, they are referred back to the call provider to attempt contact again.
16. Following these processes, if contact still cannot be made then the close contact is escalated to the PHU of domicile for follow-up.
17. The timeframe for completing the initial call to a Close Contact, either by NITC or referral back to the relevant PHU, is 48 hours from the identification of the contact.

Utilisation of Finders Service

18. The Finders Service process is prioritised for Close Contacts who are awaiting initial contact, and for Casual Plus Contacts that have been identified during the case investigation process.
19. For Casual Plus contacts that self-identify as having been exposed at locations of interest, they are provided the appropriate advice upon contacting Healthline. They provide their contact details to Healthline for the NITC to make further contact. In the instance that these are incorrect, Finders Service process can be utilised but at a lower priority than that of other contacts.

Referral to support adherence with advice

20. Close Contacts that are not responding to communications or who require local support are escalated to the relevant PHU.
21. Local procedures and agreements are in place to assist with establishing contact and provide support through local networks, including mobile van testing and manaaki/support services (food packages, financial assistance and cultural support).
22. Since 1 March 2021, the Auckland Regional Public Health Service protocol for undertaking home visits has been strengthened, with home visit providers being engaged at an earlier stage.

23. For Casual Plus Contacts that have been identified through the case investigation process, repeated attempts to make contact through all possible mediums are undertaken to ensure they are tested and able to stay at home.
24. If a Close Contact reports COVID-19 symptoms, they are immediately referred to the PHU of domicile for management to ensure they are encouraged to be tested, with barriers to testing being identified and worked through.
25. If community outreach is unsuccessful, use of the Health Act Section 70 order, as issued on 5 March 2021, can be utilised.

Equity

26. The NITC has processes in place to undertake ethnicity matching of the caller with the contacts to support their engagement with the messaging and advice.
27. The NITC and PHUs utilise translation services to ensure contact can be made in the preferred language of the contact to ensure their understanding of the information.
28. The NITC has outreach pathways with local providers for Māori and Pacific communities.

Next steps

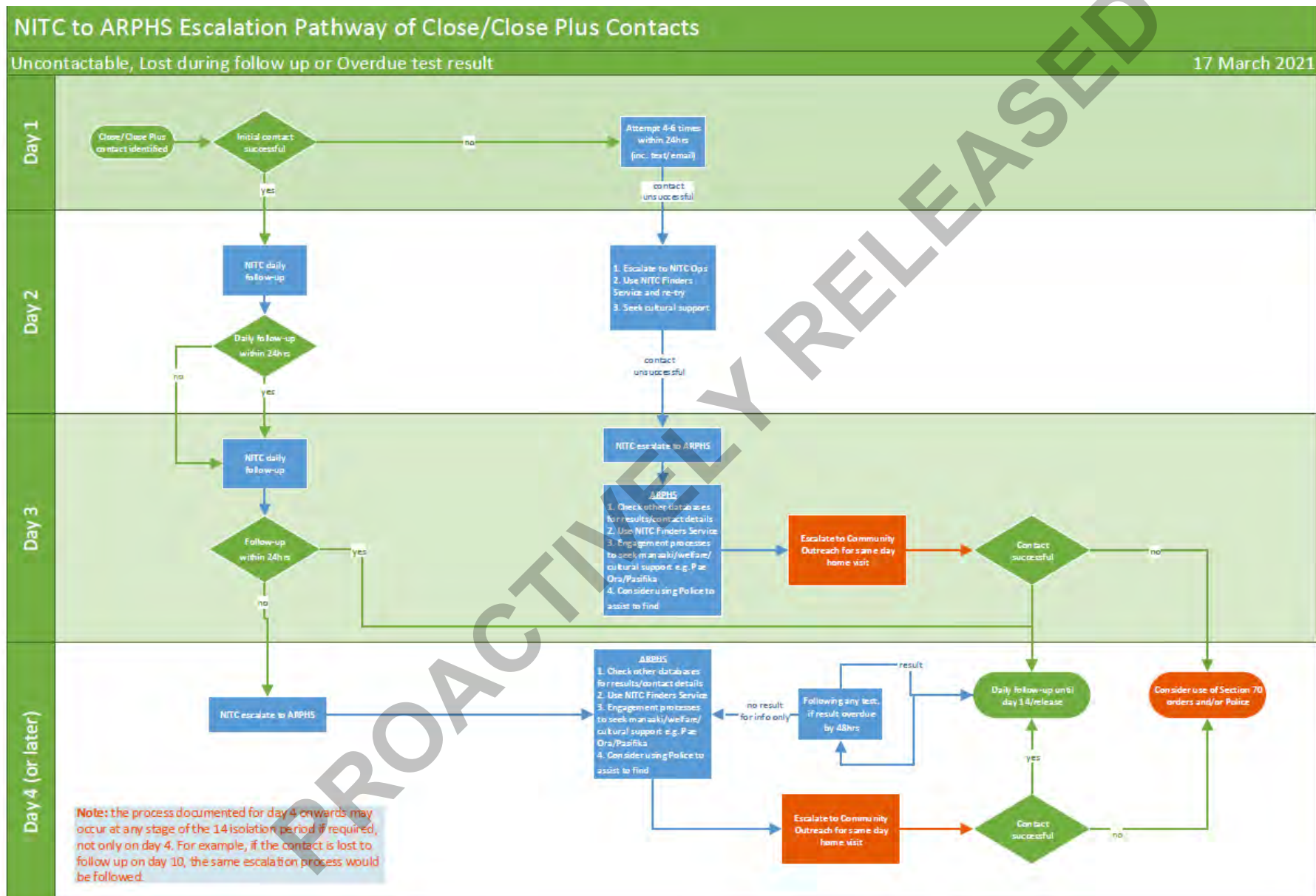
29. The February outbreak has highlighted challenges associated with a small number of contacts who were not successfully contacted by NITC. In response to this, the Ministry and ARPHS Service have developed a more comprehensive referral protocol to escalate and actively manage with those that require follow-up. This protocol involves local providers who are able to support affected communities and draw on local relationships with community leaders in order to successfully engage with contacts. Where deemed necessary, home visits will be undertaken by the local home visit providers.
30. Officials can provide further information about this topic at your request.

Sue Gordon
Deputy Chief Executive

COVID-19 Health System Response

Date: 25 March 2021

Appendix 1: NITC Escalation pathway for Close Plus and Close Contacts



Appendix 2: ARPHS Escalation pathway for Close Plus and Close Contacts

ARPHS Escalation Pathway of Close/Close Plus Contacts

Uncontactable, Lost during follow up or Overdue test result

17 March 2021

