

# **Contact Investigation Skill Development Guide**

## **Sample Responses & Key Points**

# ACTIVITY 1: Basic CI Interviewing Techniques

## PART 1: Review

### Sample Responses to Reflection/Discussion Questions

#### 1. *Be prepared.*

**Think about various types of diseases that require contact investigation.**

**How might you prepare for each type of interview?**

**What diagrams or documents might be useful during each type of conversation?**

Generally, contact investigation is employed as a public health strategy only in cases of communicable diseases or conditions that cause serious illness, serious disability, or death.

Examples of such diseases include:

- Smallpox
- Tuberculosis
- Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS)
- HIV infection
- Infectious syphilis

To prepare for each interview:

- Organize all field investigation activities.
- Gather and organize relevant information (e.g., medical, social, epidemiological)
- Confirm locating information.
- Gather as much information as possible to provide the patient, such as diagrams, documents, pictures of disease complications, progression, and transmission.

#### 2. *Ask questions.*

**What are some examples of open-ended questions you can ask to encourage discussion?**

Use who, what, when, where, and how questions. For example, instead of the following closed questions, use the corresponding open questions:

##### **Closed-ended**

Are you Joe?  
Does Joe live here?  
Is Joe home?  
Does Joe work?  
Is there a way for me to reach Joe?  
Do you live alone?  
Did your doctor talk to you about your illness?

##### **Open-ended**

Who is Joe?  
Where does Joe live?  
When will Joe be home?  
Where does Joe work?  
How can I reach Joe?  
Who lives with you?  
What did your doctor tell you about your illness?

### 3. *Be assertive.*

**When what you hear contradicts what you already know, how can you confront inconsistencies in a calm and non-judgmental manner?**

Assertively yet tactfully confront the contradiction or evasion, solve the underlying issue, and motivate the patient.

- Be direct and clearly explain the facts or issues that are contradictory. Use scientific facts about the infection and/or transmission, to highlight inconsistencies without putting the patient on the defensive.
- Explain the importance of the issue, and express your concern for their health and the health of others.
- Emphasize that you understand this situation can be challenging or embarrassing, but remind them of confidentiality.

Examples of tactfully confronting a contradiction:

A few moments ago you mentioned \_\_\_\_\_. Now I hear you saying \_\_\_\_\_.  
Could you tell me more?

From what we know of this infection, people are infectious when \_\_\_\_\_. So, based on your description of symptoms and what we know about how this infection works, the most likely time of transmission would have to be \_\_\_\_\_.

You mentioned earlier that you've had sex only with your wife during the past 20 years and that you can't understand how you could have acquired syphilis in the last 6 months if your wife's test is negative. Most of the people with whom I speak find it difficult to talk about the people they have had sex with. To protect the health of others, we need to talk about everyone you've had sex with. Who was the last person, besides your wife, that you've had sex with?

### 4. *Listen actively.*

**What specific behaviors will help you communicate that you are attentive and interested?**

**How can you verify your understanding of what the person is saying?**

Provide verbal and nonverbal feedback and restate the points they have communicated. To verify your understanding of what the person said with verbal feedback, ask clarifying questions, such as: "This is what I hear you saying....., Is that accurate?" Nonverbal communication (such as eye contact and head nods) can communicate that you are interested and understand what they are communicating.

## PART 2: Practice

### Sample Responses to Scenario Questions

#### Scenario A: Family Members

You are investigating a case of indirectly transmitted disease and are interviewing John, the index case patient, in his hospital isolation room. John's physician told you that John lives with several family members in a small dwelling. You need to secure information from John about the names and ages of the family members and an alternative to the dwelling as way to locate them.

*How will you secure this information?*

It is important to 'set the stage' for John. Data privacy and confidentiality practices need to be clearly outlined and described to John prior to asking him any specific questions. John should be informed about the purpose and intended use of the data. He also needs to be informed whether his provision of information is voluntary or legally mandated, as well as what potential consequences might result from providing or not providing the information. John should clearly understand who is authorized to receive the information he provides.

Once all of this information is clear to John, ensure that he understands the infection and risks of transmission, to underscore the importance and rationale for obtaining the information. It can be helpful to frame the discussion by saying, "Since we have talked about how serious this infection is, and how easily it can be transmitted, let's talk about who might have either exposed you or been exposed by you. Let's start with where you stay..."

#### Scenario B: Settings

Later in the interview with John, you need to secure specific information from him about other settings (such as work or hangouts) where John may have acquired or transmitted the causative agent of his indirectly transmitted disease.

*How will you secure this information?*

At this point in the interview, you would have already 'set the stage' for John to share information, by clearly and fully explaining data privacy and confidentiality practices. To gain information specific to other settings, it may be helpful to start with general questions such as "Tell me about where you work (or go to school) and what you like to do." Once you gain that general information, you can get more specific, with questions such as, "You said that you went to the bar last week. What bar did you go to? How often do you go there?..."

*How might you motivate John to provide you with detailed and accurate information?*

Explain to John the severity and risks associated with the infection, emphasizing that there could be people who inadvertently exposed/infected him, as well as people whom he may have inadvertently exposed/infected. Explain to John that those people are at risk if they do not receive testing/treatment. By clearly explaining what is done with that information and how contacts are handled, you might help motivate John to provide detailed and accurate information. Also remind John that his name will not be given to contacts without his explicit permission.

Hesitation in providing detailed and accurate information usually stems from a lack of understanding. Verify that John understands the infection and risks, the urgency and importance of the information, and how seriously confidentiality is handled (as explained above). If John still hesitates, you can try a direct approach, such as, "You seem hesitant to discuss this information with me. What are your concerns?"

## ACTIVITY 2: CI Interviewing Principles

### PART 1: Review

#### Sample Responses to Reflection/Discussion Questions

##### 1. *Voluntary.*

**What results are likely if you attempt to intimidate or coerce an interviewee to provide information?**

Intimidation or coercion will not help you get you the information that you are seeking; it is likely instead to result in the interviewee refusing to cooperate. It might also cause mistrust of the public health system among community members.

To encourage participation, what consequences can you explain to the interviewee, both for providing information and for not providing information?

Consequences of providing data may include more accurate and complete information about the person's individual health circumstances, and recommendations for medical care. You can also appeal to the patient's sense of 'greater good' or community good, by explaining that they are helping others to become or stay healthy and to avoid the risks and dangers of continued transmission.

Consequences of not providing data may include the person not receiving such information or recommendations. When explaining consequences, however, the investigator should never mention or threaten the withholding of medical care or services. You can also appeal to the patient's sense of community by explaining that withholding information can result in other people's suffering, disease, and potential disability.

##### 2. *Confidential.*

**How can you gain the interviewee's confidence that all information is confidential?**

Assure interviewees that information they provide about themselves or others:

- Will be held in confidence
- Will not be shared with contacts or third parties
- Will be shared only with health department personnel working to prevent the disease under investigation, the interviewee's personal physician to assist with their diagnosis and treatment, and others the interviewee authorizes to receive the information.

Remind interviewees that most states have laws in effect that govern personally identified communicable disease data held by governmental agencies. Confidentiality is reinforced by program policy in every locality. Keep all information with any patient identification under lock and key. Never disclose any information about anyone else (such as contacts) to the patient.

Be prepared to explain to the interviewee what you/your agency will do with information and why. Patients should be informed of the identities of persons who are authorized to receive the information.

**How can you remain vigilant in protecting data from inadvertent disclosure?**

During the course of an investigation, carefully consider what you say to others (such as neighbors or housemates), as well as how you say it. Also consider where and how your documentation is stored, how documents are processed in your work setting, and who has access to them.

**3. *Client-centered.***

**Why are “why” questions irrelevant in a contact investigation interview?**

In general, questions that begin with “why” are irrelevant in a contact investigation interview and can, in fact, interfere with two-way communication. “Why” questions usually imply that the interviewee is being asked to justify thought and actions, and this implication can cause the interviewee to take a defensive posture or believe they are being judged.

**What types of questions help you identify and solve problems that arise during a contact investigation interview?**

The use of open-ended questions that begin with who, what, when, where, and how.

## PART 2: Practice

### Sample Responses to Scenario Questions

#### Scenario A: Carrier

You are conducting a contact investigation pertaining to Mike O., a carrier of Mycobacterium tuberculosis. Mike has been diagnosed as having active pulmonary tuberculosis (TB) that was highly infectious during the past three weeks, based on his history of a persistent productive cough and the observation by laboratory personnel of many acid-fast bacilli in three of Mike's sputum samples. His diagnosis is unequivocal, based on a positive Mantoux test, risk factors, chest x-ray and CT scan findings, laboratory findings, and signs and symptoms. When you meet with Mike and tell him you want to speak to him about his TB, he adamantly denies that he has TB and says there's no reason to speak with you further.

*How would you handle this situation?*

Your place of employment should have a plan in place for how to handle situations when all attempts to engage a patient are unsuccessful. This plan should consider such issues as the urgency of the situation and level of risk for the patient and for others.

Anticipate possible reasons for Mike's denial (stigma surrounding TB; Mike's possible prior experiences with healthcare agencies or the government; Mike's possible fear of legal consequences if the government discovers his visa status, alternative lifestyle, etc.)

Remain calm. Explain the natural course of TB and the meaning of the test results in plain language that Mike can understand. Reinforce/confirm what Mike's physician has told him about TB.

#### Scenario B: Contacts

You have convinced Mike that he has TB and now you need to identify contacts exposed to his TB. You know from Mike's attending physician that Mike had been working at a homeless shelter during the three weeks preceding his TB diagnosis. When you ask Mike about where he has worked during the past two months, he states that he has been unemployed during the entire time period.

*How would you handle this situation?*

Tactfully and assertively state your understanding of Mike's employment. Work to understand and resolve his hesitation and motivate him (remind him of the potential implications and the confidentiality policy.) Ask about volunteer work. It might be helpful to create a safe "out" for Mike by saying something such as: "I mentioned earlier that because physicians must report this infection, I have some background information from your medical chart. By law, doctors must report certain information, and I see from your information that you work at a homeless shelter. Are you employed there or do you volunteer?"

## ACTIVITY 3: Telephone Contact Investigation

### PART 1: Review

#### Sample Responses to Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. ***Prepare.***

**When contacting by telephone, how can you determine that you are talking to the right person?**

Utilize whatever information that you have available to determine that you are talking to the right person – such as a date of birth, name of hospital or doctor/clinic.

2. ***Protect Confidentiality.***

**How can you verify that the contact has sufficient privacy to speak freely to you?**

Let the person know that this call has to do with personal medical information, and ask the person if he or she can speak freely. If you hear others in the background or the person states that it is not private, you may need to contact them at a later time.

## PART 2: Practice

### Sample Responses to Scenario Questions

#### Scenario A: Wrong Number

You are assigned to locate Mr. Spiro Keats, a contact to primary syphilis. The index case patient reported having had daily sexual intercourse with Spiro during the three-week time period the patient's infectious genital lesion was present. The index patient has told you that Spiro has lived at his residence for 20 years and is reclusive, having few, if any, visitors. You have confirmed Spiro's phone number and call him: a male answers, you ask to speak with Spiro, and the male says, "You've got the wrong number."

*How would you respond to the person?*

Repeat the telephone number you dialed and ask if that is the number you reached. In a tactful yet assertive fashion, confront Mr. Keats, inform him of the importance of the call. You may tell him that it's medically related but nothing more until you have verified his identity. Address his concerns for privacy and confidentiality.

#### Scenario B: Who are you?

You are a 45-year-old male disease investigator assigned to locate Tina, a 16-year-old girl who has been exposed to HIV, hepatitis C, and hepatitis B through needle sharing with her 25-year-old boyfriend to inject crystal meth. Tina is the daughter of affluent parents who reside in a suburb. You call the telephone number you've been given to reach Tina; a male answers, you ask to speak to Tina, and the male responds, "I'm her father. Who are you? And why do you want to talk to my daughter?"

*How would you respond to the person?*

You must be cordial but assertive and not defensive or explanatory. Avoid answering the question, and say as little as possible, other than stating your name. Restate what you want: "I need to speak with her about an important personal matter." If the father pushes for more information, you may reply: "Because it is a personal matter, I'm unable to discuss it with you, but I can assure you that it is very important for her." If the father pushes even further, you may reply: "She is free to speak with you about this call if she chooses, but I am only able to speak with her about it."

Another option: "My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I work with the \_\_\_\_\_. I'm trying to reach a friend of Tina's and Tina is the only person I know of who can help me." (When you speak with Tina in a private setting, explain what you told her father before you tell her about the exposure.)

## ACTIVITY 4: Field Contact Investigation

### PART 1: Review

#### Sample Responses to Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. **Prepare.**

**How can you verify that an address exists and that a contact resides *there*?**

You can look in a telephone directory, an online directory such as whitepages.com, a cross directory, offices of public assistance, utility companies or post office. You can also utilize other available resources based on the situation (such as court checks, drivers license bureau or motor vehicles bureau).

**How can you be confident about where you are going and how to get there?**

You can be confident about where you are going and how to get there by looking up driving directions with an internet mapping service online prior to leaving and make sure that you have a map in the car.

2. **Protect confidentiality.**

**How can you protect the contact's confidentiality when consulting other people about a contact's residence?**

Do not tell others the reason for your visit or where you work. If at all possible, do not drive a vehicle that is marked with your company/program name or logo. Keep papers that may contain patient information covered and out of site.

3. **Be safe.**

**How can you avoid potential threats or confrontations during investigations in the field?**

- To improve safety in the field, it is important to know where you are going as an investigator.
- Do not change attire with the intent of blending in to the environment of the location.
- Be discreet, but noticed by others so they are aware of your presence in the area.
- Do not create a potential confrontation or threat by wearing or carrying articles that look valuable to others.
- Have a sense of escape option if trouble ensues or there is a real or perceived threat to personal safety.
- Keep co-workers and/or supervisors informed of your planned movements and check in periodically during the course of the investigation.

## PART 2: Practice

### Sample Responses to Scenario Questions

#### Scenario A: Field Visit

You are a 25-year-old female disease investigator. You have been assigned to interview Larry, a 49-year-old male who has been diagnosed as having HIV infection. You try to reach Larry by telephone to arrange the interview and the number is disconnected. You make a field visit to his residence at 6:30 p.m. You knock on the door, and a woman in her 40's answers the door; you ask to speak with Larry and the woman, with suspicion in her voice and on her face, calls out to Larry. A man arrives at the doorway and the woman remains.

*What would you do under these circumstances?*

Let Larry know that you need to speak with him in private and ask where would be the best place to speak in private.

#### Scenario B: Notification

You are a colleague of the investigator in Scenario 1. You are assigned to notify the woman in that scenario, who is Larry's wife, of her exposure to HIV infection.

*What key issues must you consider in formulating a plan to make the notification?*

- Confidentiality (do not reveal or discuss ANY information about one spouse to the other)
- Timing of visit/notification (Are you aware of times when one spouse is home and the other is not?)
- How was Larry infected and when was he most likely infected?
- Has Larry notified his wife? / Is Larry's wife aware of his infection and her exposure?
- When was Larry's wife's last HIV test?
- Are Larry and his wife sexually active together or potentially sharing blood/blood products in any way (e.g., through needles)?
- Who else could be potentially exposed/be at risk?
- Are any children (especially young children) also possibly at risk if Larry's wife is infected?
- Will there be any risk to the investigator if this notification of infection/exposure brings to light marital issues?
- What resources may be helpful for Larry and his wife in considering the situation?