

Important Facts to Know: Close Contacts & Potential COVID Exposure

A triad of healthy behaviors – mask wearing, physical distancing, and hand hygiene – **dramatically** reduces the likelihood of contracting COVID. They are primary prevention strategies.

In addition to these three strategies, if we are to contain the spread of COVID, the importance of eliminating close contact situations whenever possible cannot be overstated. Thus, it is vital to understand clearly what constitutes a **close contact**. Once you have that clear understanding, the next important question is *“How many close contacts do I create on a daily basis, and how could I have avoided creating them?”* By asking this question of ourselves daily, we will grow increasingly adept at practicing excellent primary prevention, and optimize the chances for a healthy and successful on-campus semester.

If you are correctly following the primary prevention guidelines, close contacts should be rare events. But since we know that they will inevitably occur, let’s go over the definition of a close contact and some typical campus examples.

A close contact is anyone that you have spent more than 15 minutes within a 24 hour period, while **LESS** than **6 feet** apart.

A close contact is **ALSO** anyone with whom you have, shared cups, unwashed utensils or toothbrushes, or have kissed.

A close contact is **ALSO** anyone who has directly sneezed, coughed, or spit on you.

A close contact is NOT:

Spending time in a room with someone (ex: classroom) if you have maintained the 6’ spacing

Passing by someone in a hallway.

Living in the same building or floor as somebody.

Occupying a space (non-simultaneously) that someone previously occupied.

What happens if a close contact is found to be COVID positive?

If someone with whom you have been a close contact is found to be COVID positive, you will be asked to quarantine for 10 days. Once that happens, **there is no amount of testing that will shorten the 2-week quarantine.** You will be asked to test on day 5 & day 7 of your quarantine to determine if you have become positive.

What if I am not sure, but I think I may have potentially been exposed?

Any behavior that does not fit the criteria for close contact can be termed a **potential exposure.** Getting out of your bed in the morning is a potential exposure, albeit a VERY small one; giving someone a handshake or a high-five is also one---and a little higher on the risk scale. Neither approach the level of risk that a close contact does, but clearly the former is less risky than the latter.

What about ?

So now that we have a clear definition of what a close contact is, let's review a few scenarios, quiz-style! Answers are provided below.

Questions

1. I found out someone in my chemistry class tested positive for COVID. That class is an hour long. Am I a close contact?
2. Someone down the hall in my dorm tested positive for COVID. I spent 3 hours with their **roommate** 2 nights ago. Am I a close contact?
3. I kissed my boyfriend yesterday and he tested positive today. Am I a close contact?
4. I accidentally collided with someone walking down the hall. We were both masked, and we then continued walking.
5. I was eating at the Daily Grind with three friends at a table for half an hour. Is that a close contact?
6. I share a hall bathroom with someone who recently tested positive for COVID. Am I a close contact?

7. I borrowed a raincoat and boots from a roommate who has now tested positive. Am I a close contact?
8. I worked out at the Rec for an hour yesterday next to someone on the adjacent machine. They tested positive today. Am I a close contact?
9. I have a roommate----am I automatically a close contact?

Answers:

1. You are **not** a close contact. W&M has gone to great lengths to assure that classroom seating is configured so as **NOT** to create a close contact.
2. You are **not** a close contact. Their roommate is likely to be one, but spending time around a *close contact* of a positive case does not make you one.
3. You **are** a close contact. Remember that any exchange of saliva is a close contact—even if the kiss lasts less than 15 minutes!
4. You are **not** a close contact. The encounter was less than 15 minutes and did not involve an exchange of saliva or significant respiratory droplets. Breathing on someone only counts as close contact if it is for 15 minutes or longer.
5. You are a close contact. The size of those tables does not allow for 6 foot spacing, and the period of time you were together exceeded 15 minutes. Also, eating together is higher risk since you can't wear a mask while eating.
6. You are **not** a close contact. Sharing a space where someone previously was, does not make you a close contact. Sanitizing surfaces and your hands, of course, is still recommended.
7. Sharing clothes—while not advisable, is **not** a close contact.
8. You are **not** a close contact, the machines have been reconfigured to assure that the minimum 6 foot distancing is maintained.
9. Generally, yes. The truth is, it may be difficult to avoid being a close contact of your roommate in a relatively small dorm room. Reports are encouraged if you believe you are a close contact at: <https://reportcovid.wm.edu/>.

Let's Stay Healthy Together!