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What to say to a friend who tested positive for covid

When a COVID-19 case is confirmed, our Public Health team conducts a contact investigation (also known as contact tracing), which focuses on identifying, testing and isolating people with high or medium risk of infection from a confirmed case. The contact investigation will review the places and people the confirmed cases may have come into contact with during the time the case would have been infectious. Any people or places believed to be high or medium risk will then be contacted to proceed with testing and isolation. Below is a table from the CDC, clarifying the types of exposure that might lead to infection. Most importantly, the CDC clarifies brief encounters in the community do not carry significant risk. Risk Level Exposures Identified Through Contact Investigation No Identifiable Risk Interactions with a person who has symptomatic laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 that do not meet any of the high-, medium-, or low-risk conditions below, such as walking by the person or being briefly in the same room. Low Risk Being in the same indoor environment (e.g., classroom, a hospital waiting room) as a person with symptomatic laboratory-confirmed case of COVID-19 for a period of time, but not meeting the definition of close contact Medium Risk Close contact with a person laboratory-confirmed case of COVID-19 (For COVID-19, a close contact is defined as any person who was within 6 feet of an infected person for a total of at least 15 minutes within a 24 hour period). On an aircraft, being seated within 6 feet of a traveler with symptomatic laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 infection (approximately two seats in any direction) Living in the same household as, an intimate partner of, or caring for a person in a non-healthcare setting (such as a home) to a person with symptomatic-laboratory confirmed COVID-19 infection while consistently using recommended precautions for home care and home isolation High Risk Living in the same household as, being an intimate partner of, or providing care in a nonhealthcare setting (such as a home) for a person with symptomatic laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 infection without using recommended precautions for home care and home isolation If believe you have experienced a high or medium risk exposure to someone with COVID-19, you should quarantine yourself in your home and contact your healthcare provider. If you do not have a healthcare provider or have questions regarding other matters, please call the COVID-19 CA Hotline (833)422-4255. Learn more about COVID-19 testing in Marin County by visiting our Testing Information webpage. (Table source: U.S. Centers for Disease Control) We've all had to sit through a number of talks throughout our lives. Cleveland Clinic is a non-profit academic medical center. Advertising on our site helps support our mission. We do not endorse non-Cleveland Clinic products or services. Policy You have "the talk." You know, the one that awkwardly covered the birds and the bees. There's the "If you live under my roof" speech. Then you have the "Sorry, this relationship's not going to work" conversation. Or on the positive side of things, you might have enjoyed a number of "you can do it" motivational speeches over the years. Whether they're light or heavy, talks are a part of life. And if we communicate effectively and empathetically, we can expect the outcomes to be more positive than negative. Lately, many people have found themselves in positions where they've had to engage in more serious talks — talks regarding their positive COVID-19 statuses or exposure to the virus. They're not easy conversations to have. For some, they can bring on feelings of shame or embarrassment. On the other hand, these conversations could possibly break the bonds that they once had with loved ones. So how do you tell someone that you have COVID-19? Psychologist Adriane Bennett, PhD, offers helpful tips for navigating through the process and working through the emotions that could result from it. Why it might be hard for people to tell others that they have COVID-19 According to Dr. Bennett, there are a number of reasons why people might be afraid to have the COVID-19 talk with others. "It can vary from person to person and there are many internal factors that can make this act difficult," she says. "For those who believed that the concerns about COVID-19 were exaggerated or even a hoax, they might be in denial about having COVID-19 or they might try to minimize things by telling themselves that it is not a big enough deal to tell anyone." This is quite common, especially when the person is asymptomatic or has very mild symptoms. Other people may be embarrassed or ashamed that they are infected because they weren't consistent with social distancing and contact precautions. "On the other hand, people who were very careful but still exposed might feel embarrassed or angry," Dr. Bennett says. "This response might be magnified, especially when other people in their lives gave them a hard time for being 'too careful' earlier on in the pandemic. "However, external factors are fairly consistent. Many people are often worried about negative responses from the people they are telling. They also might worry about having to answer a barrage of questions, some of which they might not know the answers to." Overcoming shame is very necessary if you're ashamed about your diagnosis. Dr. Bennett suggests not letting shame or fear keep you from sharing your status with others. But it's understandable why many might feel this way given how some have resorted to shaming or even "canceling" people who've done things that they don't agree with. "Shame is an emotion that's evolved in reference to our social interactions," she says. "It's triggered if we believe we have violated some societal rule/norm, violated our own values or we think we will be rejected by people we care about if our personal characteristics or behavior is made public. Shame gives us information. "This can be helpful if it is signaling us to avoid unhelpful behaviors or make amends for our transgressions. But shame can also be problematic if people get stuck in it, it's out of proportion to the transgression or no actual violation took place." Don't let shame keep you from doing what's right Unfortunately, shame can be a barrier to people telling others about their COVID-positive test results. Dr. Bennett stresses that it's crucial to dig a little deeper into what you're feeling and determine why you're feeling ashamed. In the end, you might be ashamed for something that is way beyond your control. "If someone feels ashamed, I encourage them to think about what is triggering the shame and to determine if an actual violation occurred. COVID-19 is so contagious and spread by asymptomatic/pre-symptomatic people, that even those who take reasonable precautions can still get it. Healthcare and other essential workers can be exposed to COVID-19 through no fault of their own while trying to help others. I would challenge shame in these situations, especially if someone did nothing wrong and tried their best." Get mentally prepared Finding out that you were exposed to or infected with COVID-19 is stressful enough as it is. You might have doubts about talking to someone about your status or feel like the news won't be well-received. Dr. Bennett suggests giving yourself a little pep-talk beforehand to calm your nerves and put your worries at ease. "Remember why you're disclosing your positive COVID-19 test result. Simply put, it's just the right thing to do. Keep in mind that others have the right to know so they can make choices about getting tested, quarantining or seeking other treatment options. Also, because we care about our friends and family, we want them to know if they could have been exposed, especially if they are vulnerable," says Dr. Bennett. And again, she recommends doing it sooner than later. "Tell others as soon as COVID-19 is suspected. For instance, telling roommates right away is crucial because social distancing within the home may be necessary. Don't delay or wait for contact tracers to tell them because that could be days later. You always want to consider the relationship in the process — not telling others as soon as you suspect that you are infected or were exposed could negatively affect the trust between you and those you care about in the future." What should you say during your COVID talk? If you're at a loss for words, Dr. Bennett suggests getting straight to the point. "Just come out and say it — and be direct and honest," she says. "A simple 'I'm calling to tell you that I tested positive for COVID-19, and because we were in close contact, I wanted you to know.' Prepare for questions that others may ask, and determine the ones that you are prepared to answer beforehand. "Some questions may not have an answer. For instance, many people are unsure of where they contracted COVID-19. In these cases, 'I don't know' is an honest answer. Just resist the urge to get into debates and focus on the goal of the conversation — to inform others that they may have been exposed." How people can learn from this experience Dr. Bennett points out that while there can be a great deal of uncertainty in revealing that you have or might have been exposed to COVID-19, there are also some positives that could come out of the process. "After telling others, people may find self-forgiveness helpful," she says. "If they made a mistake or miscalculation, such as gathering with those outside their bubble because no one seemed sick or relaxing social distancing due to pandemic fatigue, then the shame may be out of proportion. "After telling others, I would encourage people to think about the lessons they've learned — and what is within their control to change next time. For those who were engaging in high-risk behavior without taking the necessary precautions) or people who were symptomatic but minimized the concerns and went to events anyway, I would encourage them to listen to what the shame is trying to tell them." How to handle negative responses Dr. Bennett says people can have a wide range of emotional reactions including anxiety, fear and anger. She suggests giving them space to have their reaction. "Don't try to minimize, challenge it or tell them how they 'should' be feeling. Negative reactions could be magnified if the person who is COVID-positive waits too long or the exposed person finds out from someone else first, such as a contact tracer. This could diminish trust in the relationship going forward. If the discussion gets heated, taking a break and debriefing later once things cool down may be helpful." Ultimately, giving people a genuine apology and being aware of their feelings can go a long way. Dr. Bennett explains. "After telling others, apologize, repair the relationship by acknowledging the feelings of others, take feedback gracefully, apply the lessons that you've learned by changing future behavior and pursue self-forgiveness," she says. "Remember, everyone makes mistakes — and you can show others that you 'get it' by owning your piece of responsibility and by doing things differently in the future."

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