

The Virgin Islands Consortium

CDC's Latest Definition of Covid-19 'Close Contact' May Lead to Much More Testing

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The V.I. Department of Health said Wednesday that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has updated its policy for "close contact" that vastly expands the definition.

The CDC now defines close contact as "someone who was within six feet of an infected person for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period, starting from two days before illness onset (or, for asymptomatic patients, two days prior to test specimen collection) until the time the patient is isolated."

The operative word here is *cumulative*, meaning even if you leave and come back to the location where you had contact with an infected person, once it adds up to 15

minutes, you may need to get tested under the CDC's new expanded definition. "If I'm in your space even for a minute and leave and I come back for another minute, and I leave come back — let's say I'm in your space for 15 minutes" then that's considered close contact, said Dept. of Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion.

Previously, the CDC defined close contact as someone who had spent at least 15 *consecutive* minutes within six feet of someone infected with Covid-19. In this case, the operative word is *consecutive*.

The broadened definition will likely result in more individuals being identified as close contacts and may need to get tested for the virus.

Ms. Encarnacion told the Consortium that the updated guidelines for close contact provided even more evidence that mask-wearing should be taken seriously. This should be the case, she added, not only when individuals are inside an establishment, but outside as well, pointing to the confirmation that the disease can spread in the air through tiny respiratory droplets.