



Health Canada and the Public  
Health Agency of Canada

Santé Canada et l'Agence  
de la santé publique du Canada

Canada

# COVID Alert Exposure Window

## Canada's Exposure Notification App

Special Advisory Committee - October 8, 2020

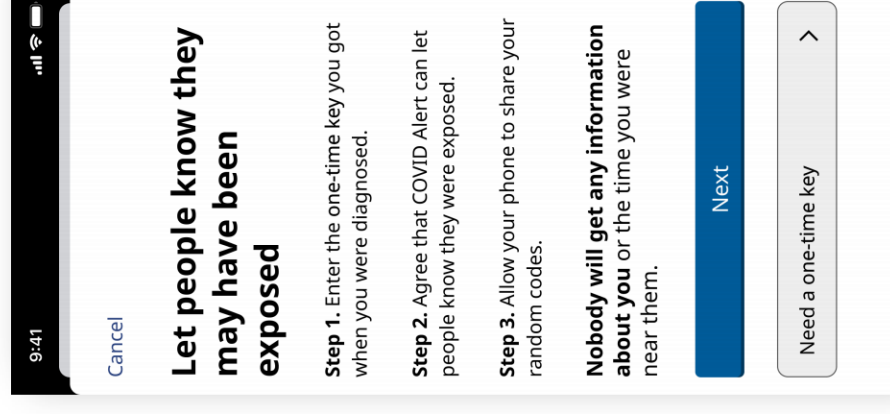


## Purpose

- To validate the planned update to the **exposure window** for the COVID Alert app, outlined below.
- When a user tests positive for COVID-19 and enters their one-time key, they will be asked if they have symptoms:
  - If yes, they will be asked to enter their symptom onset date.
    - Close contacts will be notified from **2-days prior to the symptom onset date to entry of the one-time key**.
  - If no, they will be asked to enter their test date.
    - Close contacts will be notified from **2-days prior to the test date to entry of the one-time key**.
  - If they prefer not to say, they will not be asked for a date.
    - Close contacts will be notified from **14-days prior to entry of the one-time key**.
- For the time period following entry of the one-time key, close contact will be notified for up to 14-days.

## Exposure Window

- The **exposure window** for the app is the timeframe in which a user is considered a close contact of someone who later tests positive for COVID-19.
- Currently, COVID Alert notifies all close contacts from 14 days prior to entry of the one-time key (positive test result).
- Concern was raised that a broad exposure window could result in low risk contacts receiving a notification.
- This can put unnecessary pressure on the
  - public health system (e.g., testing, call centres)
  - individual (e.g., testing, self-isolation, anxiety)

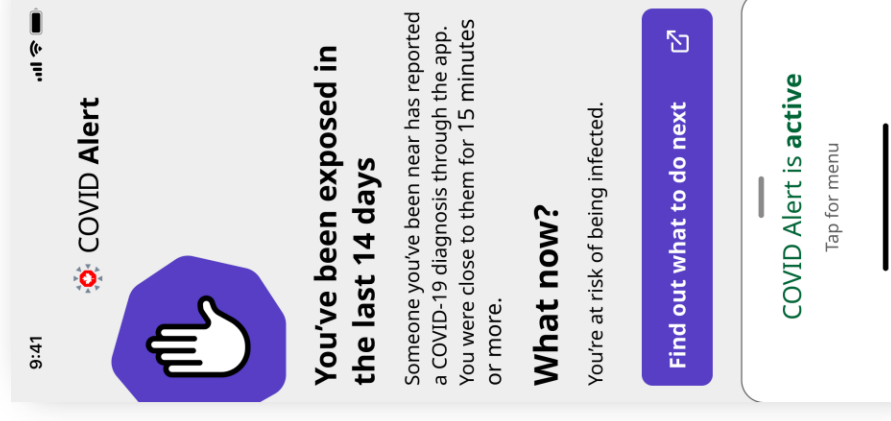


## Public Health Guidance

- Best currently available scientific data supports that the infectious period for COVID-19 begins up to 3 days prior to symptom onset.<sup>1</sup>
- Based on this evidence, the Public Health Agency of Canada's (PHAC) interim guidance for the management of contacts associated with COVID-19 specifies that 48 hours prior to symptom onset be used to identify close contacts at risk of infection.<sup>2</sup>
- This 48 hour timeframe has been adopted as the standard public health practice for contact tracing.
- If individuals do not have symptoms, 48 hours prior to test date is used.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/guidance-documents/sians-symptoms-severity.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/health-professionals/interim-guidance-cases-contacts.html>



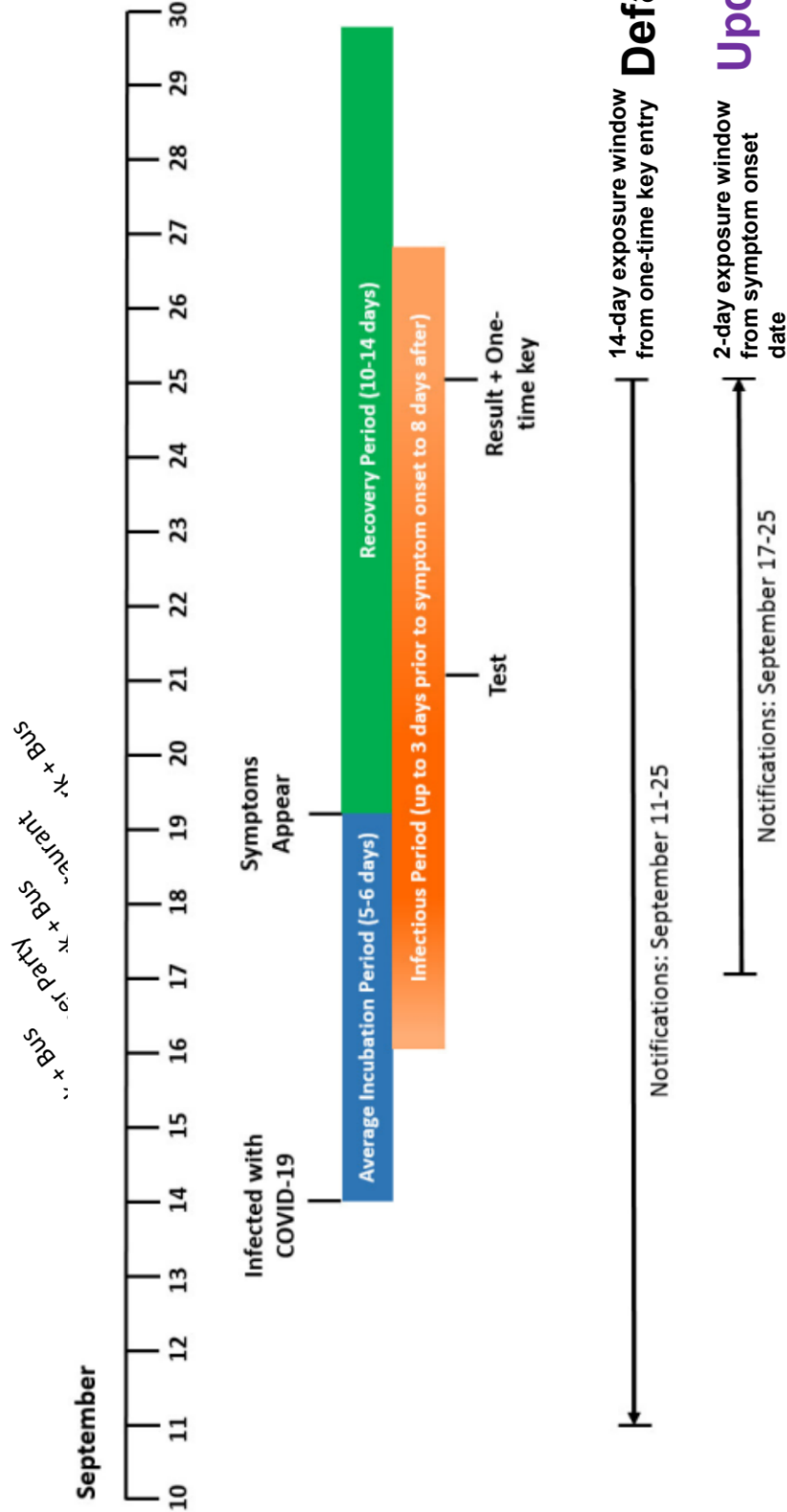
## Contact Tracing v. Exposure Notifications

- Contact tracing and exposure notifications are two different but complimentary approaches to identifying possible exposure to COVID-19.
- **Contact tracing** involves manually identifying and contacting close contacts of a confirmed case to provide public health advice.
- **Exposure notifications** inform close contacts of a possible exposure and provide public health advice without manually identifying or contacting them.
- Both processes have downstream impacts on public health services and close contacts, such as calls to public health authorities, testing and isolation.
- While exposure notifications are less resources intensive initially, their ability to notify a high number of close contacts quickly can have significant downstream impacts.
- The advice provided for close contacts identified through contact tracing and exposure notifications can change over time and may not always be in alignment.

## Scenario 1: Symptom Onset Date

- On September 14, Jane attends a BBQ and is unknowingly infected with COVID-19 by someone who is asymptomatic.
- September 15, 17 and 19 Jane travels on public transport to work.
- She attends a dinner party on September 16 and goes for drinks at a restaurant on September 18.
- On September 19, while at work, Jane develops a runny nose and sore throat. She travels home on the bus and rests assuming it is a cold.
- Over September 20 she develops a dry cough and a fever.
- September 21, Jane goes to a COVID-19 testing center and self-isolates until she receives her results on September 25.
- September 25, she receives a positive test result and enters her one-time key into the COVID Alert app.

# Scenario 1: Symptom Onset Date

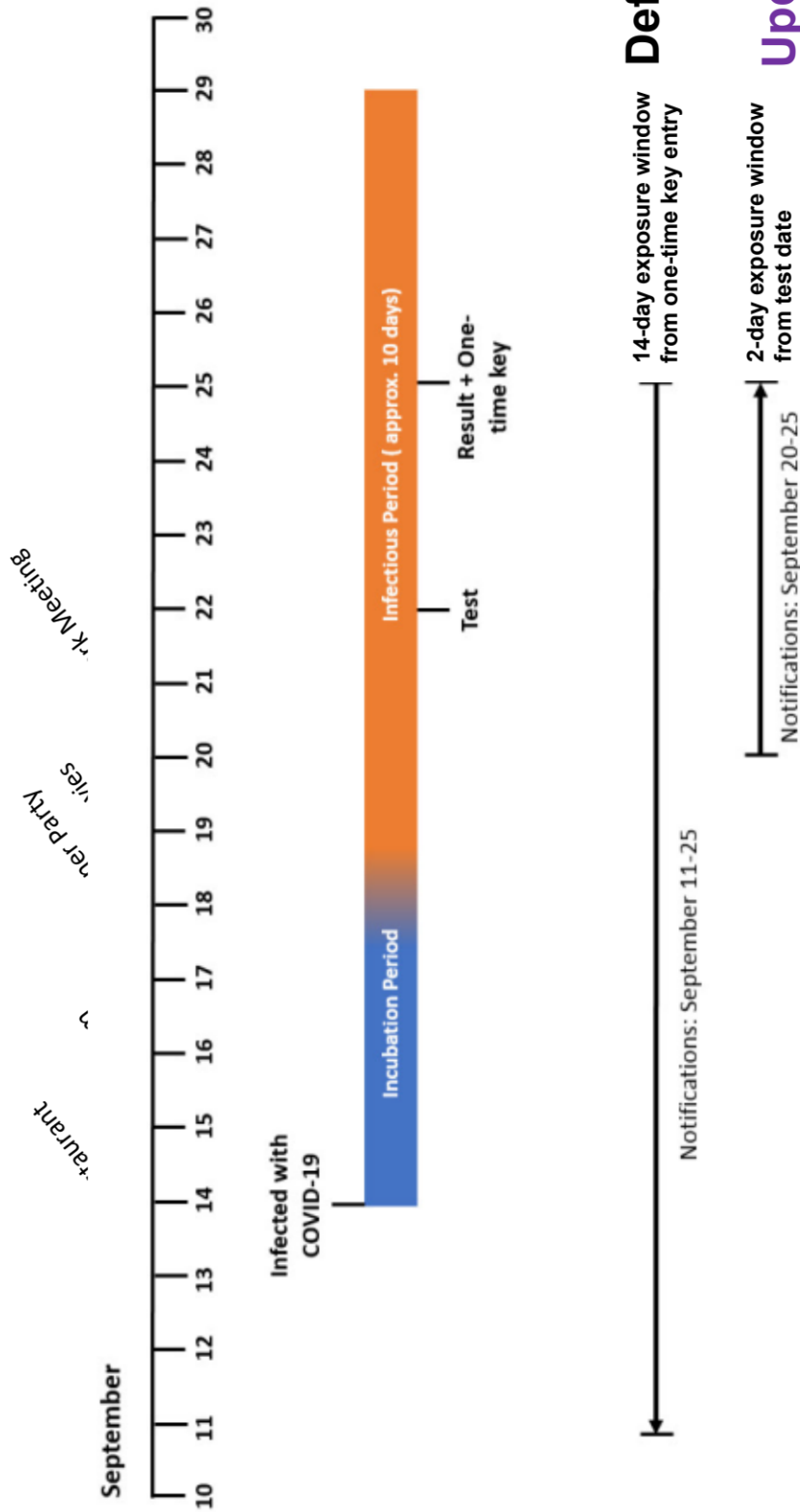


## Scenario 2: Test Date

- On September 14, Jean goes to a restaurant for dinner and is unknowingly infected with COVID-19 by someone who is presymptomatic.
- Over the next eight days Jean goes to the gym on September 14, hosts a dinner party on September 16, sees a movie on September 19, and attends a work meeting on September 21.
- The evening of September 21, Jean receives a call from his local public health unit that he is a close contact of a confirmed COVID-19 case and should be tested.
- On September 22, Jean goes to a COVID-19 testing centre and self -isolates until his receives his results.
- September 25, he receives a positive test result and enters his one-time key into the COVID Alert app.



# Scenario 2: Test Date



## Considerations

- It is critical that this update is communicated clearly so the Canadian public remains confident in the app.
- The 14-day incubation period for COVID-19 is well known among the public and informs guidance around self-isolation. It will be important to clarify that this period has not changed.
- CDS conducted usability testing for this feature in August. Overall reception was positive, and user feedback enabled CDS to refine the flow and content to make the purpose of asking for the date of symptom onset/test clearer.
- The risk of re-identification of a user remains low. The Privacy Assessment will be updated to include information on the update.
- The Advisory Council has been briefed on the new function.

## Validation

- Seeking validation that the parameters used for contact tracing should also be used for the exposure notification app as follows:
  - 2-days prior to symptom onset for symptomatic cases
  - 2-days prior to test date for asymptomatic cases
- The 14-days prior to entry of one-time key (positive test results) would remain the default exposure window if a user prefers not to enter symptom onset or test date.