Summary of Update: Massachusetts is adopting the updated CDC guidance as noted below, to include risk of exposure up to “48 hours before symptom onset.” As we are learning more about COVID-19 and the risk of transmission from people before symptoms develop, there is accumulating evidence to support this change. MDPH still believes that symptomatic individuals are more likely to spread infection, but both laboratory and epidemiologic evidence support the likelihood of some transmission prior to symptom onset.

- MDPH will update the period of exposure risk from “onset of symptoms” to “48 hours before symptom onset.”

Please adopt this guidance for contact tracing going forward.

Background supporting this change:

- COVID-19 is a new virus and we are learning more about it every day. MDPH has consistently acknowledged that uncertainties existed and that recommendations would change as we learned more.
- Available evidence increases our understanding of the time when people with COVID-19 can spread the virus to others. We now know that some individuals are capable of transmitting the virus 48 hours before their symptoms start.
- MDPH now recommends that case investigation should include identification of people who had close contact with the case while they had symptoms and for the 48 hours before those symptoms began. Close contacts should all self-quarantine for 14 days following their last contact with the confirmed case.
- Previous recommendations focusing on close contacts that occurred during the period when someone was ill/symptomatic have been effective at reducing transmission.
- This new knowledge and the associated recommendation changes will further improve our ability to limit spread of the virus.

The updated CDC guidance can be found here:

“Public Health Recommendations for Community-Relate Exposure”