



Interim Guidance:
Preventing Spread of COVID-19 among Persons Experiencing Homelessness
Updated March 11, 2020

AUDIENCE: The following preliminary guidance was developed by the San Francisco Department of Public Health for use by persons experiencing homelessness (PEH) and service providers of PEH. This guidance can be found online at <http://www.sfchcp.org>.

BACKGROUND:

Novel coronavirus disease, or COVID-19, is a new respiratory disease that can spread from person to person. Most people who get the infection have no symptoms or mild symptoms of a cold. Some people have gotten very sick from it and need to be hospitalized – especially people who are older and have chronic medical conditions. The most common signs and symptoms of infection include fever, cough, difficulty breathing, fatigue, muscles aches, sore throat, and headache. Nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea are less-common symptoms of COVID-19. At present, there is no vaccine to prevent COVID-19 and no treatment after someone has been exposed to COVID-19. The best way to prevent the spread of the virus is to avoid being exposed to the virus.

GUIDANCE FOR PERSONS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS:

Although the risk of getting COVID-19 is low, there are many cold or flu infections you can get which can look just like COVID-19 and will make it hard to take care of your daily activities.

Practice everyday preventive actions that can help prevent the spread of germs:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue, under the neck of your shirt, or into your elbow.
- Clean your hands as often as possible, especially after going to the bathroom, before eating, and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing
 - When available, use soap and water to wash hands for at least 20 seconds;
 - If soap and water are not available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% ethanol.
- If you have symptoms of a cold or flu (such as cough, runny nose, sore throat), wear a face mask when you are around other people.

When working with service providers:

- If you have symptoms of a cold or flu, please wear a mask when seeing service providers.
- If you notice a service provider has symptoms of cold or flu, ask them to wear a mask before seeing you.



If you have symptoms of a cold or flu or if there is an outbreak of COVID-19 in your community, limit your interactions with others. That includes avoiding, when possible, places such as:

- Shopping centers
- Movie theaters
- Stadiums
- Libraries
- Community centers
- Public transportation. Try to avoid taking public transportation while sick, but If you need to take public transportation and you have symptoms of a cold or flu, please wear a mask if one is available.
- Group meals and food pantries. If you rely on these for food and you have symptoms of a cold or flu, please wear a mask if one is available.

GUIDANCE FOR PROGRAMS PROVIDING SERVICES TO PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS:

Stay up to date with local and state COVID-19 activity and developments (in addition to CDC):

- <https://www.sfdph.org> If there is a COVID-19 outbreak in San Francisco, it will be announced here.
- <https://www.sfcddcp.org/covid19> Answers to frequently asked questions.
- <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/Immunization/ncov2019.aspx> California info.

Additional resources addressing respiratory illnesses among PEH:

- ATD Guidelines: [Preventing Aerosol Transmissible Disease: A Reference Guide for Homeless Shelters and Residential Treatment Facilities](#)
- National Health Care for the Homeless Council [Pandemic Flu Guidance](#)

Provide education for staff and clients:

Place signs that encourage cough and sneeze etiquette, hand hygiene, and staying home when sick ([English](#)) ([Simplified Chinese](#)) ([Spanish](#)), at the entrance to your building and in other areas where they are likely to be seen such as:

- Gathering areas
- Dining areas
- Bathrooms
- Staff lounges

Train employees and clients to clean their hands often with an ethanol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60-95% ethanol or wash their hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Soap and water are preferred if hands are visibly dirty.



Provide hygiene and prevention materials:

- Provide easy access to soap, water, hand drying resources, and ethanol-based hand rubs at:
 - All entries
 - Dining areas
 - Public phones
 - Computer stations
 - Elevators
 - By the doors of community rooms
 - The bedsides of ill individuals

- Encourage the use of and distribute disposable face masks to any person with a cough or other symptoms
 - If someone is coughing or sneezing, have them wear a disposable face mask when they are within 6 feet of other people
 - Change the mask if it gets saturated
 - Wash hands after changing mask

Ensure that adequate supplies are present and maintained:

- Hot and cold running water. Hot water should be maintained at 100°F. If temperature control is automatic, ensure that it does not exceed 120°F
- Liquid hand soap
- Paper hand towels
- Ethanol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60-95% ethanol
- Facial tissues– place at entrances and community areas
- Plastic-lined wastebaskets– place at entrances and community areas
- Disposable surgical masks
 - For clients who are coughing or sneezing
 - For staff working closely with sick clients
- Gloves in a variety of sizes (for staff)
- Disposable gowns (for staff)
- Signs addressing hygiene ([English](#)) ([Simplified Chinese](#)) ([Spanish](#))
- Disposable wipes for staff to clean surfaces



Update your master cleaning schedule and instructions:

- Train staff in how to mix and use disinfectants and sanitizer solutions.
 - Follow all label instructions
 - Use damp cleaning methods. Dry dusting or sweeping can cause airborne virus droplets.
 - Change mop heads, rags, and other cleaning items frequently
- Provide staff with gloves for cleaning
- Wipe down commonly used surfaces (for example, doorknobs, keyboards, remote controls, desks) before each use with disposable wipes.
- Clean all common areas at least daily; clean heavily used surfaces more frequently (e.g. doorknobs, elevator buttons, public phones, banisters, tabletops, handrails, workstations, and countertops)
- Empty trash receptacles frequently
- Clean toys daily, and discourage sharing of plush toys (such as teddy bears) between children
- Regularly clean air vents and replace filters, especially those with HEPA filters

No special disinfection products are required. See COVID-19 Environmental Cleaning Recommendations for Non-Healthcare Businesses and Organizations Serving the Public at <https://www.sfcddcp.org/covid19>

Encourage all staff and clients to get the influenza vaccine to prevent illness that is similar to COVID-19.

Actively encourage sick employees to stay home.

- Staff with cold or flu-like illness should not work until 24 hours after fever and other symptoms have gone.
- Ensure sick leave policies allow employees to stay home if they have symptoms of infection.
- Do not require a healthcare provider note for employees who are sick with cold or flu-like illness to return to work, as healthcare provider offices may not be able to provide such documentation in a timely way.
- Staff developing symptoms while at work should immediately don a facemask, notify management, and leave work.

Service programs may serve as a “home” for many PEH and thus continued service is essential.

To reduce the likelihood of COVID-19 cases:

- **Mealtimes**
 - Have staff hand supplies or food to clients, rather than clients reaching into common supplies
 - If feasible, stagger meals to reduce crowding.
 - Stagger the schedule for use of kitchens



▪ **Bathrooms**

- If feasible, stagger bathroom schedule to reduce the number of people using the facilities at the same time.
- If feasible, have one designated bathroom for ill persons

▪ **Recreation/Common Areas/Group Activities**

- Create a schedule for using common spaces.
- Hold fewer large group activities in favor of smaller groups.
- Consider cancelling group activities.

▪ **Transport**

- Transport fewer people per trip so passengers don't sit too close together.

▪ **Staff activities**

- Don't hold large meetings when information can be communicated in other ways.
- Consider conference calls instead of in-person meetings

Screen clients for symptoms

- Screen on intake and daily for:
 - Fever (temperature over 100.4°F or 38°C)
 - New cough
 - Shortness of breath, respiratory difficulties
- Have thermometers available for staff

If a client has new cold or flu symptoms, including a cough or fever:

▪ **Evaluate the situation:**

- If the client's illness is severe, seek emergency medical assistance.
- If the person has reason to believe they may have been exposed to COVID-19, they should contact their healthcare provider before seeking care. If the person does not have a health care provider, they can seek care at Tom Waddell Urgent Care, 50 Ivy Street and preferably call ahead (415-713-1963), or ZSFGH Urgent Care (628-206-8000).
- Otherwise, evaluate the severity of the ill client's symptoms:
 - Ask what symptoms they are having
 - If you can measure temperature, do so. For this topic, a temperature of 100.4°F or 38°C or higher represents a fever.



- Clients should not be told to seek medical care if they are not ill or have mild symptoms for which they would not ordinarily seek medical care.
- **Identify a space for ill clients.** If possible, also identify a separate bathroom. Do your best to accommodate the client's needs at your site.
 - Try to situate the client in a comfortable space at as much distance as possible from other clients and staff. If there are no separate spaces:
 - Find a well-ventilated area (e.g. open doors or windows)
 - Select a space with the fewest number of other clients
 - Avoid placing the ill client with clients who have health conditions that increase the risk of complications from COVID-19 (such as lung or heart disease)
 - Increase spacing between beds
 - Use sheets or curtains to create temporary barriers between beds
 - Encourage the client to rest and drink plenty of fluids
 - Provide easy access to tissues and hand sanitizer
 - Bring meals to the ill client
 - Limit the number of people who interact with the client as much as possible until 24 hours after symptoms resolve
 - Have staff members wear a mask when interacting with the client
- **Instruct the client in hygiene**
 - Encourage the ill client to wear a mask when within 6 feet of others
 - Instruct the ill client in hand hygiene and cough etiquette.
 - Make sure the ill client has access to hand sanitizer and, if possible, soap and water.
- **Increase the frequency of cleaning all surfaces**

For clients who have confirmed COVID-19 infection and their close contacts: The San Francisco Department of Public Health, in partnership with the city's Emergency Operations Center and other city agencies, will explore alternative housing, food, and transportation services for residents who have confirmed COVID-19 and their close contacts to help protect the community's health.