



## Interim Guidance for Safe Sleeping for Unsheltered Persons Experiencing Homelessness to Reduce the Risk of COVID-19

May 19, 2020

The following guidance was developed by the San Francisco Department of Public Health (SFPDH) for local use, and will be posted at <http://www.sfdcp.org/covid19>. This interim guidance may change as knowledge, community transmission, and availability of testing changes.

**AUDIENCE:** Street based outreach workers and Healthy Streets Operation Center (HSOC) staff, and police assessing locations where people experiencing homeless are living on the streets during shelter in place.

**BACKGROUND:** Persons experiencing homelessness may have an elevated risk for COVID-19 transmission and be especially vulnerable to outbreaks of COVID-19. The risks associated with sleeping outdoors or in an encampment setting are different than from staying indoors in a congregate setting. Sleeping outdoors often does not provide protection from the environment, adequate access to hygiene, food, and sanitation facilities, or connection to services and healthcare. Neighborhoods with high concentrations of unsheltered individuals may also be more vulnerable due to unsafe conditions in public places.

### Recommendations for Safe Sleeping on the Street

#### General Guidance

- Per CDC guidance, if individual housing options are not available, allow people who are living unsheltered or in encampments to remain where they are.
  - Clearing encampments can cause people to disperse throughout the community and break connections with service providers. This increases the potential for infectious disease spread. See *CDC Interim Guidance on Unsheltered Homelessness and COVID-19 for Homeless Service Providers and Local Officials* at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/homeless-shelters/unsheltered-homelessness.html>
- If possible, work with the residents of a known encampment area to create conditions that will benefit the entire city and community by limiting the spread of COVID-19, as detailed below.
- If there is no overcrowding, community safety or sanitation issues, the recommendation is to not ask people to leave the area where they have been staying in one encampment and move to another encampment.
- The City will prioritize moving individuals who are vulnerable to poor health outcomes from COVID-19 to Alternative Locations when it is safe to do so. These include people over 60 years old and/or have chronic co-morbidities. For information on people at higher risk for severe illness due to COVID-19, see *FAQ for Health Care Providers* at [sfdcp.org/covid19hcp](http://sfdcp.org/covid19hcp).



## Structural Guidance

### Individuals in encampments must have access to the following services and hygiene supplies:

- Toilets: 1 per 10-15 persons
- Sinks or handwashing stations: 1 per 15-20 persons, stocked with hand hygiene materials (soap, drying materials)
- Hand sanitizer stations: 1 per 10 persons
- Showers: 1 per 20-30 people
- Garbage: 1 dumpster/waste area per 20 people
- Drinking water, minimum of 2 liters per person per day
- Three meals a day
- Cloth face coverings or face masks – with replacement if soiled
- Facial tissue or facial wipes
- Harm reduction supplies and syringe disposal

### Tent Recommendations/Sleeping on the Street

Each encampment should be assessed, and staff should then work with individuals to achieve the following:

- Encampment Spacing for Sleeping:
  - Tents or other sleeping quarters are recommended to have at least 12 feet x 12 feet of space per “individual” structure. (Ex: 10 individuals with or without a tent would need 1500 sq. feet to be safe)
  - Tents should ideally be occupied by one individual. If people are sharing a tent, they are encouraged to use a face covering, and must express understanding that their tent is considered one unit, with risk of exposure to all individuals in the tent.
  - The number of tents or people in an area should be determined by safety and health parameters. Tents and people should not exceed capacity to support hand hygiene, bathroom, garbage pick-up, and physical space as follows:
    - 144 sq. feet of space per tent, sleep structure, or person (10 people or tents need 1500 sq. ft.; 20 people or tents need 3000 sq. ft.)
    - 10-15 people per toilet
    - 15-20 people per hand hygiene station
    - 20 people per dumpster/waste area: One dumpster/waste area per 20 people
- Space Between People or Tents:
  - People sleeping without a tent or similar shelter should sleep 6 feet apart from others on all sides, with head to toe sleeping.
  - Leave 6 feet of space from the entrance of a tent or similar structure, and at least of 3 feet on either side of the tent, with enough room to safely walk around the tent.
  - Remove any belongings or obstacles from sidewalks and paths so that people can stay 6 feet apart while walking.



## Minimize Neighborhood Impact

**Safe Sleeping areas should not infringe on the safety of the neighborhood. These recommendations should be followed to minimize neighborhood impact:**

- Sidewalk and paths must be passable, with enough space so that people can stay 6 feet apart while walking on them.
- Tents or other sleeping quarters
  - May not be within 6 feet of the entrance to a residence, business or public transit stop
  - Cannot interfere with pedestrian traffic on commercial corridors or recreational walkways
  - Cannot be established in parks except in designated areas
  - Must follow all guidelines and directives from the SF Fire Department related to emergency services and fire safety
  - Must uphold environmental health standards and regulations.
  - The number of tents or people in an area should be determined by the safety/health parameters described above.
- If people are unable or decline to move from an unsafe sleeping location, or have inadequate hygiene facilities or support for safe sleeping and social distancing on the street:
  - If possible do not immediately clear encampments without a plan for moving residents safely to another location.
  - **Remind people that there is a health order** to social distance and shelter in place, and the impact of overcrowding and poor sanitation on their health and health of others.
  - **Inquire about barriers** to hygiene, spacing safely and following the neighborhood impact guidance for the individual or tent grouping, and address if able.
  - **Contact the Healthy Streets Operations Center (HSOC)** at 415-558-2723 to obtain support for the area so outreach workers can engage the impacted person(s). HSOC will work to help address their needs and maintain safety.

## Prevention Measures

### Communication Strategies

- Provide straightforward communication to people sleeping outside in the appropriate language.
- Identify community providers and people living on the street who are influential in the community and can help communicate recommendations for COVID-19 prevention and harm reduction measures.
- Post signs in strategic locations to provide information on hand hygiene, safe sleeping, respiratory hygiene, harm reduction, overcrowding, and what to do if someone has symptoms.
- Ensure communication about changes in homeless services policies and/or changes in physical location of services such as food, water, hygiene facilities, regular healthcare, and behavioral health resources.



- Identify and address potential language, cultural, and disability barriers associated with communicating COVID-19 information to workers, volunteers, and people experiencing street homelessness
- When indicated, request up-to-date contact information for each person, including phone, email and emergency contact.

### General Prevention Measures

- **Educate individuals and staff** on the importance of staying 6 feet apart and wearing face masks/cloth face coverings, as well as basic measures to prevent spread of infection, including hand hygiene, respiratory hygiene, cough etiquette, and wiping down and sanitizing sinks after use.
- **Encourage individuals and staff to wash their hands often** with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially before eating, after going to the bathroom, or after blowing their nose, coughing, or sneezing. If soap and water are not easily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.
- **Provide supplies needed for handwashing and hygiene.**
  - Maintain adequate cleaning supplies of hygiene materials for all individuals
  - Ensure all hand cleaning stations are well-stocked with soap and drying materials.
  - Make alcohol-based hand sanitizer and tissue widely available
  - Ensure that there are enough plastic-lined wastebaskets to dispose of used tissues and disposable wipes, as well as uneaten food or discarded belongings. Empty wastebaskets frequently, so that they do not overflow.

### Prevention Measures for People Living on the Street

- **Advise residents to stay 6 feet apart from other people when outside a tent.**
- **Encourage residents to wear a face mask or cloth face covering outside their tents:**
  - Residents should wear a facemask or covering when they are within 6 feet of others, and ideally whenever they are outside their tents. Facemasks or coverings should cover both the nose and mouth. Cloth face coverings may be made from bandanas, scarves, t-shirts, sweatshirts, towels, or other materials.
  - If anyone in a shared tent is at higher risk for severe COVID-19 illness, all residents in that tent should also wear a face mask or cloth face covering inside their tent. For a list of people at higher risk for severe COVID-19 illness, see *FAQ for Health Care Providers* at [sfdcpc/covid19hcp](https://sfdcpc/covid19hcp).
  - Exceptions are individuals who have been told by a medical provider not to wear a face covering; who have trouble breathing; who cannot take off a face covering without help; or who have a physical, intellectual, or developmental disability that affects their ability to safely wear and remove a face covering.
  - Residents should always wash their hands or use hand sanitizer before and after touching their face or face coverings. Cloth face coverings should be washed frequently.



- **If people visit with each other socially, they should NOT do so in a tent.** Socializing should be done outside, staying 6 feet apart and while wearing face coverings.
- Encourage residents to **socialize with as few people as possible**, and to limit social interactions to the same small group of people each day. This will decrease the opportunity for COVID-19 to be introduced into their immediate social circle by others.
- Encourage residents to:
  - Not share things outside of their small social circle
  - Avoid people who are sick
- If Public Works conducts a power-washing, ask individuals to stay as far away as possible. The cleaning can help decrease risk for infection, but the spray while they are cleaning could be dangerous for spreading COVID-19 and other germs.

### Prevention Measures for Outreach Workers

- **Wear facemasks or cloth face coverings at all times** while at work, per CDC guidelines and San Francisco Health Order No. C19-12
- **Stay at least 6 feet apart from clients and other staff**, when possible. CDC suggests that outreach workers
  - Greet individuals from a distance of 6 feet and explain that they are taking additional precautions to protect themselves and the client from COVID-19.
  - If an individual is not wearing a facemask or cloth face covering, provide the individual with one.
  - Continue conversations and provision of information while maintaining 6 feet of distance.
  - If at any point the staff feels unable to protect themselves or the individual from the spread of COVID-19, they should discontinue the interaction and notify their supervisor. Examples include if an individual declines to wear a face covering or if the staff is unable to maintain a distance of 6 feet.
- Outreach staff should maintain good hand hygiene by washing hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or using hand sanitizer (with at least 60% alcohol) on a regular basis, including before and after each client interaction.
- CDC recommendations for Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for homeless service providers are included in the *CDC Interim Guidance on Unsheltered Homelessness and COVID-19 for Homeless Service Providers and Local Officials*, at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/homeless-shelters/plan-prepare-respond.html>. Sites should refer to the CDC webpage above for the most up-to-date guidance. As of 5/12/2020, CDC recommendations for homeless service providers included the following:

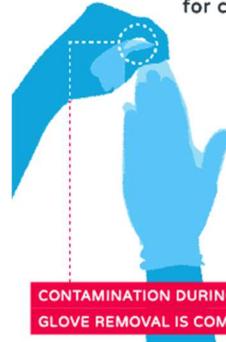


- Advise staff to avoid handling client belongings if possible. If staff must handle client belongings, they should use disposable gloves.

- Train staff using gloves to ensure proper use and ensure they perform hand hygiene before and after use.
- If gloves are unavailable, staff should perform [hand hygiene](#) immediately after handling client belongings.
- A sign on hand hygiene and gloves is at <https://www.cdc.gov/handhygiene/campaign/provider-infographic-6.html>

## GLOVES ARE NOT ENOUGH

Wearing gloves is NOT a substitute for cleaning your hands.



- ▶ Your hands can get contaminated while wearing or removing gloves.
- ▶ Cleaning your hands after removing your gloves will help prevent the spread of potentially deadly germs.



- CDC recommends the following PPE when staff must be within 6 feet of a resident without a physical barrier, for example, when checking temperatures:
  - Facemask (surgical or procedure mask),
  - Eye protection (goggles or disposable face shield that fully covers the front and sides of the face), and
  - Disposable gloves.

Per CDC,

- A physical barrier; such as a glass window or plexiglass barrier to protect the staff's face from respiratory droplets produced when the client sneezes, coughs or talks; is more effective than PPE alone.
- Staff must be trained on PPE use.
- Cloth facemasks and face coverings are not PPE and should not be used when a surgical mask or procedure mask is indicated as PPE.
- Staff should launder work uniforms or clothes after use using the warmest appropriate water setting for the items and dry items completely.
- Sites should consult with Health & Safety, Infection Control, and Risk Management regarding the current availability, alternatives, and safe use of PPE.

## Screening and Isolation

- Outreach workers will screen individuals for COVID-19 symptoms during each encounter.

### Screening Procedure

For detailed instructions, see SFDPH guidance, *Asking COVID-19 Screening Questions and Measuring Temperatures when Screening for COVID-19* at [sfcdp.org/covid19](https://sfcdp.org/covid19) under "Businesses and Employers."

- Clients should wear a face mask or cloth face covering when being screened.



- Outreach workers should stay 6 feet away from the client, except when unavoidable, (e.g. taking temperatures). CDC recommendations for PPE are summarized in “Staff Prevention Measures” above.
- Ask the person being screened if they have any of the following symptoms, not explained by an existing medical condition in the past 24 hours:
  - Fever, including subjective or intermittent fever
  - Chills or repeated shaking or shivering
  - Cough
  - Sore throat
  - Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
  - Feeling unusually weak or fatigued
  - Loss of taste or smell
  - Muscle pain
  - Headache
  - Runny or congested nose
  - Diarrhea
- If the person being screened has not had any symptoms, take their temperature with a non-touch (infrared) thermometer:
  - For the purpose of screening, SFPDH defines a fever as a temperature  $\geq 100^{\circ}\text{F}$  ( $37.8^{\circ}\text{C}$ )
  - Be aware that non-touch thermometers can give low readings when used outdoors, especially if there is wind. If the temperature is less than  $96^{\circ}\text{F}$  ( $35.6^{\circ}\text{C}$ ), re-take it.
  - If the individual says they felt like they had a fever, consider this a symptom even if the measured temperature was normal.
- If an individual reports any symptoms or has a temperature  $\geq 100^{\circ}\text{F}$  ( $37.8^{\circ}\text{C}$ ), follow the steps for isolation below.

## Isolation Procedure

### Immediately isolate individuals with suspected or confirmed COVID-19:

- If an individual is identified with fever or any of the symptoms above, or has confirmed COVID-19 infection, they should be masked immediately and be isolated from other individuals, including other individuals with possible symptoms of COVID-19, while awaiting evaluation or transport.
- If the individual was previously able to walk and cannot now (for any reason), is visibly gasping for breath, or is complaining of chest pain – call 911.
- For all other clients:
  - Contact Homeless Medical Response at 415-369-7969 (7 days a week, 7:30 AM to 7:30 PM) for evaluation for testing. A medical response team may be sent to do an assessment.
  - From 7:30 PM to 7:30 AM, call the SFPDH COVID-19 Clinician Consultation Line at (415) 554-2830 (available 24/7) for an assessment and evaluation for testing if indicated.



- If the person does not have a health care provider for consultation or a referral, the options below are available:
  - Tom Waddell Urgent Care, 50 Ivy Street: (415) 713-1963
  - ZSFGH Urgent Care: (628) 206-8000
- If a client has a positive test result or has symptoms of COVID-19 and has not been tested or is awaiting test results, and is unable to self-isolate, social service and health care providers may seek consultation and/or request a hotel room to isolate by
  - Completing a web-based isolation and quarantine referral at <https://covid19isorequest.getcare.com/referral> or
  - Calling the Containment Line (628)-652-2810

Please note: Clients cannot request an isolation room for themselves.
- If a COVID-positive individual leaves the Safe Sleeping Village before their period of self-isolation has ended,
  - Call the AMA Recovery Line at (415) 608-1515 or
  - Email [covid19amarecovery@sfdph.org](mailto:covid19amarecovery@sfdph.org)

## Resources

### San Francisco Department of Public Health (SFDPH)

- Interim Guidance: Preventing and Managing COVID-19 Transmission among People Experiencing Homelessness  
<https://www.sfdcp.org/covid19>, under “Persons Experiencing Homelessness”
- Order of the Health Officer of the City and County of San Francisco Generally Requiring Members of the Public and Workers to Wear Face Coverings (Health Order C19-12)  
<https://www.sfdph.org/dph/alerts/files/OrderNoC19-12-RequiringFaceCovering-04172020.pdf>

### Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

- Interim Guidance on Unsheltered Homelessness and Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) for Homeless Service Providers and Local Officials  
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/homeless-shelters/unsheltered-homelessness.html>
- Interim Guidance for Homeless Service Providers to Plan and Respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)  
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/homeless-shelters/plan-prepare-respond.html>
- Resources to Support People Experiencing Homelessness  
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/homeless-shelters/>



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## California Department of Public Health

- COVID-19 Guidance  
<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/Guidance.aspx>
- Recommended Strategic Approaches for COVID-19 Response for Individuals Experiencing Homelessness (PDF)  
<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/CDPH%20Document%20Library/COVID-19/Protocols-Homeless-Pop.pdf>
- Flow Chart: COVID-19 Recommended Protocol for People Experiencing Homelessness (PDF)  
<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/CDPH%20Document%20Library/COVID-19/flowchart-COVID19-homelessness.pdf>