



County of Sacramento

Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Guidance for Homeless Services March 18, 2020

Overview/Background:

Sacramento County Public Health is actively responding to the global novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak closely and working with our partners at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and California Department of Public Health (CDPH). Transmission of COVID-19 in the community could affect people experiencing homelessness in several ways. The outbreak could cause illness among people experiencing homelessness, could contribute to an increase in emergency shelter usage, or may lead to illness and absenteeism among homeless service provider staff. Furthermore, people who are experiencing homelessness are have underlying medical conditions that put them a higher risk for severe outcomes. Protecting your staff, volunteers, and clients requires a coordinated effort between homeless service providers, healthcare facilities, and the health department.

In partnership with the Sacramento County Department of Human Assistance, the City of Sacramento, Sacramento Steps Forward (SSF), the Sacramento Office of Emergency Services (OES), and others, Sacramento County Public Health is developing specific information for organizations working directly with the homeless population. This document will be regularly updated as additional information becomes available with information to promote effective hygiene, to prevent and address potential Coronavirus infections among those experiencing homelessness, and how to keep staff safe.

Transmission:

COVID-19 is a new disease and **we are still learning how it spreads**, the severity of illness it causes, and to what extent it may spread in the United States.

Experts believe that COVID-19 is spread mainly from person-to-person in the following ways:

- Between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet).
- Through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes.

- These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly inhaled into the lungs.

It may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes, but experts do not believe that this is the main way the virus spreads.

Experts believe that people are most contagious when they are most symptomatic (the sickest).

Client Considerations:

Many people with COVID-19 will have mild illness and do not need to be hospitalized. Consider the following for symptomatic clients who may not have confirmed COVID-19 by laboratory testing.

If you have a client with life threatening symptoms of COVID-19 infection, call 911.

Severe symptoms include but are not limited to:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with worsening symptom that become life threatening

Mild symptoms do not typically require medical attention but clients with these symptoms will need to be isolated from other clients and staff/volunteers. In addition, if a symptomatic client is over age 60 or has underlying medical problems like diabetes, heart disease or lung disease, weakened/suppressed immune symptoms or is pregnant, they may be more vulnerable to COVID-19 and its complications.

Clients with respiratory symptoms should also wear surgical masks to protect those around them.

Staff Considerations:

Detailed guidance for homeless shelters (also applicable to other service providers) can be found [here](#) on the CDC website.

You can take the following steps right now to reduce the risk of infection to yourself and other staff in your organization:

- Wash your hands – often! Wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol especially after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue away and wash your hands.
- Clean and disinfect the objects and surfaces you touch.

People experiencing worsening flu-like symptoms should seek medical attention and stay home until well again.

If you're feeling sick (experiencing cough, fever, or shortness of breath):

- Employees who are sick with respiratory symptoms and fever, regardless of exposure to COVID-19, should stay home until they have had no fever, cough or other respiratory symptoms for at least 72 hours after symptoms resolve, or seven days from when symptom begin, whichever is longer. If you can manage your symptoms at home, do so. If you are experiencing worsening symptoms or difficulty breathing, contact your primary care doctor for guidance. Be sure to call them before you go to their office so they can help direct you to the right level of care – and take precautions as needed to protect other patients and employees.
- Follow the instructions of your healthcare professional.
- If a physician determines that you should stay out of the workplace, you should also notify your supervisor and follow your physician's instructions for work restrictions and follow-up procedures.

You may consider avoiding non-essential travel, if possible. This would include things like conferences, non-essential meetings, etc.

Facility Considerations:

For full guidance on appropriate cleaning and disinfection recommendations for community facilities, see CDC's website [here](#).

- Linens, eating utensils, and dishes belonging to those who are sick do not need to be cleaned separately, but they should not be shared without thorough washing.
- Linens (such as bed sheets and towels) should be washed using laundry soap and tumbled dry on a hot setting.
- Staff and volunteers should wash their hands with soap and water or use hand sanitizer immediately after handling dirty laundry.

While isolating ill clients outside homeless shelter facilities is ideal, this may not be possible. Even if some designated sites are available, they might be full or overwhelmed. Although

achieving “isolation” in the shelter setting will be challenging, infection control procedures can decrease the risk for everyone. As the community works to create capacity designed for isolation, in a congregate shelter, you may want to consider re-arranging sleeping areas to help reduce spread by:

- Arranging beds at least 3 feet apart
- Creating temporary physical barriers between beds using sheets or curtains.
- Arranging beds so that individuals lie head to toe relative to each other.

To learn more, visit:

www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html (CDC)

<https://COVID19.saccounty.net>