

## **COVID-19 Preparation and Response Plan**

### **Updated 3/20/2020**

#### **Purpose**

Protecting your staff, volunteers, and clients during the COVID-19 pandemic requires a coordinated effort between homeless service providers, healthcare facilities, and the health department. Use this guide to prepare your agency for how to respond if COVID-19 cases are identified.

#### **About COVID-19**

Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a respiratory disease caused by a newly identified coronavirus that was first detected in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China, but has now been detected throughout the world. Community spread of COVID-19 has been identified in [several counties in Texas](#).

The virus spreads mainly from person-to-person, usually between people who are less than 6 feet apart from one another. It can also be spread by touching something a person with COVID-19 has touched or coughed near then touching your eyes, nose, and/or mouth.

Patients with COVID-19 have had mild to severe respiratory illness. Many people with COVID-19 will have mild illness and do not need to be hospitalized, but they should be isolated from other clients, staff, and volunteers.

Severe symptoms include:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Seizures
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough

People over age 60 or have underlying medical problems like diabetes, heart disease, or lung disease, weakened/suppressed immune symptoms, or are pregnant are more vulnerable to COVID-19 and its complications. If you have a client with severe symptoms of COVID-19 infection, call 9-1-1. Make sure to notify the 9-1-1 Dispatcher that the person you are calling about is suspected of having COVID-19.

#### **Ways to Prevent COVID-19 Transmission**

- Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol-based work.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Practice social distancing, at least 6 feet distance at all times is appropriate.
- Cough or sneeze into your bent elbow or into a tissue then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.

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- Hard surfaces should be cleaned every few hours.
- Soft surfaces should be laundered appropriately using hot water.

### Policies

- Essential Functions
  - List and describe the essential functions of your agency.
    - For example,
      - Emergency Shelter
      - Food Preparation
  - Which essential functions will have to be reduced or eliminated in the event of reduced staff and resources? In what order will they be reduced or eliminated?
    - For example,
      - In order to continue operating essential functions, the Agency will first consider reducing hours of operation and cross-training Administrative Staff.
  - What will the Agency do to ensure essential functions can proceed?
    - For example,
      - Cross train staff
      - Hire temporary staff
- Staff
  - List the staff members who can work from home.
  - List the staff members who must work from the facility.
  - Describe what to do in the event of staff illness.
    - For example,
      - Please consult the Employee Handbook for policies related to staff illness.
      - The Agency will ask staff to be cross-trained to be able to fill any vacancies created because of illness.
  - Describe how the agency will screen Staff Members for COVID-19 symptoms.
    - For example,
      - Screen staff members before they start working.
      - The Austin EMS is having staff members test their temperature every 12 hours regardless of whether they have come in direct contact with someone exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms. This might seem extreme, but it is important to remember that someone who is seemingly well, i.e., not exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms, can spread the virus.
  - Describe the frequency of training staff on COVID-19 symptoms and how to prevent transmission and who will provide the training.
- Clients
  - Describe how the agency will screen Clients for COVID-19 symptoms.
    - The recommendation is screening for symptoms upon entry into the facility. Many communities are using temple thermometers and asking questions regarding COVID-19 symptoms.

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- THN, as the TX BoS CoC Lead Agency, is developing questions that will be entered into HMIS and provided to facilities that do not use HMIS to utilize for screening purposes. The questions and the accompanying training for data entry into HMIS will be available by Friday, March 27th.
- It is recommended that anyone with respiratory symptoms (cough, fever) be provided with a surgical mask upon entry.
- It is also recommended that agencies also train Clients on the symptoms of COVID-19 and ways to prevent transmission upon entry to the facility. Also mention where signs are posted throughout the facility.
- Describe what the agency will do in the event that someone presents with COVID-19 symptoms.
  - National guidance recommends consulting with the local Public Health Department regarding the process to follow should you identify someone with COVID-19 symptoms. The questions to ask are:
    - Who should be alerted and what is the notification process?
    - If it is recommended that individuals who exhibit symptoms such as cough or fever be given surgical masks to prevent the spread of infection, can the Public Health Department provide those masks? If not, where can these masks be obtained? Will the Public Health Department consider purchasing surgical masks in bulk to provide to homeless service providers?
    - Where should people go for further assessment and/or testing?
    - What is the protocol while they wait for test results? The Public Health Department will probably encourage you to isolate the person in your facility or elsewhere, if possible.
- Identifying Clients at High Risk
  - Develop a list of clients who could be at [high risk for complications from COVID-19](#) and reach out to them regularly. (We do not recommend listing the clients here. We have heard some communities have developed an excel spreadsheet for this purpose.)
- Facility

GUIDANCE: While isolating ill clients outside homeless shelter facilities is ideal, this may not be possible. Although achieving “isolation” in the shelter setting will be challenging, infection control procedures can decrease the risk for everyone.

  - Describe how the Agency will separate sick people from healthy ones.
    - If the agency has the space to isolate clients within the shelter, e.g., individual rooms or a large well-ventilated room where multiple clients may stay, describe where the client will be isolated.
      - Questions to answer include:
        - Will the client have their own room?
        - Will the client be in a large well-ventilated room with other clients?
        - Where is the room located?

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- Will the client have access to their own bathroom?
  - Will the client have their own eating facilities?
  - Will the client have access to their own cleaning supplies?  
We do not recommend providing personal cleaning supplies if the room is occupied by a child or other person for whom such supplies would not be appropriate.
    - Identify which cleaning supplies the agency will provide:
      - Tissues
      - Paper Towels
      - Cleaners
      - Disinfectants
  - Identify the staff member(s) who will bring food, hydration, and supplies to and check on isolated clients.
    - Staff at high risk of contracting COVID-19 should not be designated as caregivers for sick clients.
  - If the agency does not have the space to isolate clients within the shelter, describe the precautions the Agency will take if keeping the individual in the same area as other clients.
  - If there are resources for isolating people off site, describe how the Agency will prioritize those resources, e.g., hotel/motel vouchers or other financial rental assistance, resources for people with COVID-19 symptoms and how they will support people in those off-site locations.
- Volunteers
  - Describe at which point volunteers will no longer be allowed at the agency. It is recommended that if the Agency can they limit visitors, including volunteers, to the facility they should.
  - Describe the process for training volunteers on COVID-19 symptoms and ways to prevent transmission.
- Cleaning
  - List high contact surfaces and the frequency of cleaning these surfaces.
    - For example,
      - Staff will clean doorknobs, toilet seats, and flush handles every hour.
  - List your cleaning assignments here if you have divvied up cleaning among staff members.
- Chain of Command
  - Describe the Chain of Command and what will happen if anyone(s) in the Chain is unavailable.
- Communications
  - What is the name(s) and title(s) of the individual who will monitor the local COVID-19 situation and the CDC guidance?

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- How often will staff, volunteers, and/or clients be updated regarding the local COVID-19 situation, including COVID-19 incidents at the Agency, guidance from the CDC, and changes to Agency policy?
- Who should be notified when clients, staff, or volunteers suspect a case of COVID-19?
- Who will notify community partners of changes at the Agency or the identification of a suspected case of COVID-19?
- Describe who will notify staff, volunteers, and clients of changes at the Agency.
  - For example, the Executive Director will notify Staff and Clients regarding ongoing developments. The Volunteer Coordinator will notify volunteers.
- Describe who will contact the CoC Lead Agency of a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19.
  - Call or text Sophia Checa at (512) 960-9951.
  - If emailing, email both Sophia and Mollie Lund at [sophia@thn.org](mailto:sophia@thn.org) and [mollie@thn.org](mailto:mollie@thn.org).
- Describe who will serve as alternate in the event the primary contact cannot notify staff, volunteers, and clients.
- Describe how people will be notified:
  - In-person
  - Email
  - Social Media
  - Phone
- Supplies
  - Describe the supplies that are needed to clean, disinfect, and ensure proper hygiene.
    - Suggestions for items to keep on-hand are listed here: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/high-risk-complications.html>.
  - Describe how much of the supplies the Agency will keep on hand.
  - Describe where the extra supplies will be stored.

### Emergency Contact List

Point of Contact Local Public Health Authority

Name

Phone Number

Email Address

In situations where people present with severe symptoms, contact 9-1-1.

### Resources

Center for Disease Control (CDC) COVID-19 Website

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

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CDC Fact Sheets

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/communication/factsheets.html>

CDC Interim Guidance for Homeless Shelters

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/homeless-shelters/plan-prepare-respond.html>

COVID-19 Guidance for Congregate and Shelter Settings

<https://multco.us/novel-coronavirus-covid-19/covid-19-guidance-congregate-and-shelter-settings>

Environmental Cleaning and Disinfection Recommendations

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/cleaning-disinfection.html>

COVID-19 Count Across Texas (DSHS)

<https://www.dshs.state.tx.us/coronavirus/>

DSHS Tracking of New COVID-19 Cases

<https://www.dshs.state.tx.us/news/updates.shtm#coronavirus>

How To Put On a Surgical Mask (VIDEO)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9VbojLOQe94>

HUD Exchange

<https://www.hudexchange.info/homelessness-assistance/diseases/#covid-19-community-planning-and-preparedness>