

Updated 3/16/2020: Frequently Asked Questions About Homelessness and COVID-19

What are the precautions we should be taking to keep our clients, staff and volunteers safe?

Some of the best things to do include practicing good hand hygiene, increasing the distance between people (6 feet), having staff or volunteers stay home if they feel sick and asking clients to put a surgical mask on if they have respiratory symptoms. Follow the guidance in "*Seattle-King County Public Health's Interim Guidance on COVID-19 for Homeless Service Providers*" this document has information on best practices to implement at your site, staff and client considerations, as well as information on how to disinfect your facility to kill COVID-19 in the environment. For more information on general infection prevention, sanitation and hygiene advice, see Public Health's [Sanitation and Hygiene Guide for Homeless Service Providers](#). The [Health Care for the Homeless Network](#) webpage has the updated version of all guidance on COVID-19.

What cleaning guidelines should we be following?

The guidance in "*Seattle-King County Public Health's Interim Guidance on COVID-19 for Homeless Service Providers*" document has information on the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommendations on how to clean, sanitize and disinfect for COVID-19 (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/cleaning-disinfection.html>), as well as recommendations from Public Health.

For more information on general infection prevention, sanitation and hygiene advice, see Public Health's [Sanitation and Hygiene Guide for Homeless Service Providers](#)

Spacing at shelters is a huge issue. Any advice?

The CDC recommends spacing all beds/mats at least 6 feet apart and arranging them in a head-to-toe manner. The more distance an organization can put in between people the lower the risk of spreading COVID-19 to others.

For agencies with multiple sites, consider using one location for people who are sick with respiratory illness or with COVID-19 and another location for people who do not have symptoms, continue to separate all beds/mats by 6 feet. Not everyone with respiratory symptoms will have COVID-19 so it is important to separate ill people at least 6 feet apart from each other.

King County has opened temporary shelters to help decrease the number of people in existing shelters.

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Someone with COVID-19 symptoms arrives at the shelter after 7pm when the Call Center is closed, is it safe for them to stay the night and get connected to care the next day?

It is ok for a person with COVID-19 symptoms to be allowed to stay in the shelter. Ask the person to wear a mask, encourage good hand hygiene and inform them they will need to stay separated from the rest of shelter guests. Ideally, place them in a room separate from the rest of the guests with their own bathroom. If this is not possible, place away from the rest of the people in a large, well ventilated room. See *“Seattle-King County Public Health’s Interim Guidance on COVID-19 for Homeless Service Providers”* for more detailed information.

If someone from our facility was tested, will we be notified of the results?

Shelters will be notified under HIPAA compliant guidance about anyone with lab confirmed positive COVID-19 disease who is identified by Public Health as staying at their location while contagious in order to start an investigation, including identifying anyone with similar illnesses and close contacts of the confirmed case. This would include guidance on how to clean and disinfect your facility.

Where should providers send patients without homes while they are awaiting COVID-19 test results?

It is ok for a person with COVID-19 symptoms or someone waiting COVID-19 test results to be allowed to stay in the shelter. Ask the person to wear a mask, encourage good hand hygiene and inform they will need to stay separated from the rest of shelter guests. Ideally, place them in a room separate from the rest of the guests with their own bathroom. If this is not possible, place away from the rest of the people in a large, well ventilated room. See *“Seattle-King County Public Health’s Interim Guidance on COVID-19 for Homeless Service Providers”* for more detailed information.

Public Health discourages homeless service providers from denying services to people because of having COVID-19 symptoms.

Some people waiting COVID-19 test results will be put into isolation until the test results are known.

Our site has shared bedrooms, bathrooms and kitchens; what should we do if someone has COVID-19 or other respiratory symptoms?

Ideally, a person with symptoms will have their own room and bathroom. The person should avoid communal areas and staff should bring food/drink to their room. If this is not possible, isolation may be an option for the sick person. Notify Public Health for assistance.

How will shelter staff be able to distinguish between COVID-19, a cold, or the flu?

Shelter staff will not be able to tell the difference between COVID-19 or another type of respiratory illness. There are many reasons other than COVID-19 that someone might have a cough including COPD, allergies, pneumonia, influenza or the common cold. The basic

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infection prevention recommendations provided in the *“Seattle-King County Public Health’s Interim Guidance on COVID-19 for Homeless Service Providers”* will help limit the spread of disease regardless of what is causing the illness.

I have heard that we should not send people to the Emergency Department because this will overwhelm.

People with mild or moderate symptoms will most likely be able to recover without the need to be evaluated in the Emergency Room or having to be admitted to the hospital. People experiencing homelessness may have underlying health conditions that put them at higher risk of serious complications from COVID-19. If a person whose symptoms started out as mild or moderate start to become worse, call 911.

What is the number for the Public Health COVID-19 Call Center?

The number is 206-477-3977 and is open 7 days/week from 8am-7pm.