

September 14, 2023

Dear King County Homeless Service Partners,

This letter outlines recommendations for limiting the spread of COVID-19 at homeless service sites in King County. COVID-19 is still circulating in our communities and new variants continue to emerge. We also expect influenza (flu), respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) and other respiratory illnesses to increase during the fall and winter months. The mitigation strategies for COVID-19 are also effective at reducing transmission of other respiratory illnesses.

As a reminder, **the Public Health – Seattle & King County (PHSKC) I&Q facility has closed as of September 13, 2023.** We are grateful to the I&Q Team for their three years of work housing 5,000 people throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Their work has helped minimize spread of COVID-19. Although you are no longer required to report individual cases of COVID-19 to PHSKC, **we still recommend reporting outbreaks (now 5 or more cases of COVID-19 within 14 days or 20% of individuals in a core group).** Additionally, the infection prevention strategies in this letter are outlined in a simple tool at the end. These documents will live [here](#).

Be Prepared:

- Stock up in case of future surges and maintain a supply of personal protective equipment (PPE) including well-fitting [high quality masks and respirators](#), test kits, and cleaning products.
- Encourage vaccination among staff and guests.
- Ensure good indoor air quality.
- Make a plan for accepting symptomatic and/or COVID-19 positive people in your facility, then isolating them away from others to the best of your abilities.
- Develop staffing plans for essential operations in case of increased transmission within your facility.

Vaccination:

COVID-19 vaccines maximize protection. Staying “up-to-date” with recommended COVID-19 vaccines (including getting a booster) provides the most protection against severe outcomes even if people have had vaccines, boosters or COVID-19 previously.

- Locations to get a COVID-19 vaccination are listed [here](#) and are generally available at no cost.
- HEART will continue to run mobile vaccination clinics on a limited basis. Please email CHS.HEART@kingcounty.gov if you would like to have a vaccination clinic at your site.
- HEART can also provide information about COVID-19 and consult with staff about how to engage, support, and open dialogue with anyone who may still feel ambivalent about vaccination.

Masks:

Masking is an important way to prevent the spread of COVID-19 as well as other respiratory illnesses. Further, it is a tool that any person can implement on their own at any time and would be especially important when in indoor public spaces. Businesses and organizations may also choose to implement masking requirements at their facilities at any time.

The [CDC](#) and [Washington Department of Health \(DOH\)](#) recommend masking in multiple situations, including:

- When someone has symptoms consistent with COVID-19 or has tested positive for COVID-19.
- When someone without symptoms is at risk of severe illness or has been exposed to someone with suspected or known COVID-19.
- When required by L&I - consult [WA State Department of Labor & Industries COVID-19 page](#).
- When advised by Public Health (for example: in a facility outbreak).
- In congregate settings that are especially [high risk due to their population or setting](#).

- When [CDC COVID-19 hospital admission level](#) is high for King County.

Ventilation:

COVID-19 is an airborne virus and can spread easily indoors, especially in crowded spaces. Improving ventilation of facilities is one of the most effective strategies for limiting transmission of COVID-19.

We recommend:

- Assess your facility's ventilation to ensure HVAC system is working well and maintained regularly.
- Consider opening windows and doors when possible and place fans to direct airflow outside.
- Maximize your HVAC system and use air purifiers with HEPA filters.
- Review [guidance for improving indoor air quality](#)
 - You can request an Environmental Health Assessment from PHSKC [here](#) too.

Isolation & Quarantine:

Isolation keeps people who are sick or infectious separated from people who are not sick. Quarantine keeps people who are not yet sick but were exposed to a disease separated from others in case they get sick.

- [DOH](#) (page 4) and [CDC](#) recommend COVID-19 positive residents and staff **isolate for 10 full days** in homeless service sites.
- Sites may decide to shorten isolation to 7 days **IF all of the following criteria are met:**
 - The individual has 2 negative antigen tests 24-48 hours apart. The earliest testing can begin is on day 6. Day 7 is the earliest day someone can end isolation.
 - Symptoms are improving and the person is fever-free for 24 hours without medication.
 - The individual was not hospitalized and does not have a weakened immune system.
- For staff, this only applies to the worksite.
- **Quarantine for exposed people is no longer universally recommended** for homeless service sites. However, individual sites may wish to consider the impact on the health and wellbeing of your staff and resident population, staffing capacity, and severity of transmission when determining whether to implement quarantine guidance especially as an enhanced strategy. See [DOH](#) guidance.
- If someone was a close contact of someone with COVID-19, they can [test 5 days after their exposure](#).

Testing and Treatment:

Mobile testing options: Note - the HEART Team ended its mobile testing services as of **September 1, 2023**.

- **Over-the-counter (OTC) test kits:**
 - Homeless service providers can continue to order COVID-19 OTC antigen test kits through PHSKC [here](#) until December 2023 or until supplies last.
 - Organizations should continue to distribute test kits until their supply is gone.
 - Per [DOH](#), expired COVID-19 test kits are acceptable to use if the quality control line ("C") appears during the test process.
 - You can find [COVID-19 testing locations and guidance](#) on our website.
- **InMotion Mobile Testing**
 - Mobile testing service providing free antigen and/or PCR testing for facilities.
 - Please email COVID Case Review COVIDCaseReview@kingcounty.gov to request testing.
 - This service is available until July 2024.
- **Point-of-care test kits (with CLIA waiver):**
 - A CLIA waiver is a certificate from DOH that allows a facility to utilize simple tests like the COVID-19 antigen test.
 - PHSKC is providing point-of-care facilities with rapid antigen test kits for both screening and diagnostic testing to prevent and respond to outbreaks. Check these links for help in understanding the regulatory and reporting requirements.

- [For reporting Point of Care Tests](#)
- [For information about CLIA licenses](#)
- [Employer guidance on the use of self tests](#)
- [For general information about testing](#)
- Homeless service providers can order COVID-19 point-of-care test kits through their assigned investigator.
- Testing should be voluntary rather than required and should not present a barrier to access housing services, regardless of whether testing is declined, or results are positive.
- Refer ill people or those testing positive for COVID-19 for medical evaluation and treatment when applicable, especially when people are high risk for severe infections. DOH provides [free telehealth appointments](#) for COVID-19 treatment.

Other COVID-19 Guidance and Reporting:

- The federal and state-level public health emergency proclamations for COVID-19 have ended. COVID-19 is still a recognized [Washington State L&I](#) workplace hazard.
- Follow [other infection prevention measures](#) such as improving access to hand hygiene, cleaning high touch surfaces, and physical distancing.
 - [Safer Cleaning, Sanitizing, and Disinfecting Guide \(PHSKC\)](#)
 - [Sanitation and Hygiene Guide \(PHSKC\)](#)
- Report COVID-19 outbreaks to PHSKC at [intake survey](#) or (206) 296-4774.

Guidance for Other Respiratory Illness:

Other respiratory illnesses, like flu and RSV, will likely co-circulate with COVID-19, especially in the fall and winter. Infection prevention guidance for these other respiratory illnesses is similar to that of COVID-19.

We recommend:

- Use mitigation strategies outlined in this letter to reduce transmission of these infections.
- Encourage flu vaccination for staff, volunteers, and residents.
- Refer people for testing and medical care of non-COVID-19 illnesses when appropriate.
- Report outbreaks of illnesses other than COVID-19 to PHSKC at [intake survey](#) or (206) 296-4774.

Stay Informed:

We encourage you to join the PHSKC Homeless Service Provider meeting and subscribe to the newsletter.

- Contact the HEART team at CHS.HEART@kingcounty.gov to get added to the monthly COVID-19 Homeless Service Provider Wednesday call.
- Subscribe to the COVID-19 Homeless Response newsletter [here](#).

Bookmark and review these key resources to refer back to:

- DOH: [COVID-19 Guidance for Non-Healthcare Businesses and Organizations \(wa.gov\)](#)
- DOH: [What to do if you test positive for COVID-19](#) and [What to do if you were potentially exposed to someone with COVID-19](#)
- PHSKC: [COVID-19 homelessness response](#)

We know reduced COVID-19 resources impacts the work you do. Thank you for your ongoing partnership throughout the pandemic, we acknowledge the immense amount of work and care that you have all put into keeping our community safe.

With appreciation for the ongoing partnership,
Public Health - Seattle & King County