

Updated 3/6/2020: COVID-19 – Quick Tips for What Shelters & Other Homeless Programs Need to Know

COVID-19 is in the news, and your agency and the people you serve will want to know about how this may impact them. Here is some preliminary information to help you field questions and care for your clients. We encourage you to share these tips with your program's supervisors, line staff, and volunteers.

Tip # 1: As Usual, Monitor Your Clients for Symptoms, and Refer to Care if Necessary.

The symptoms of COVID-19 are like symptoms of the flu, a cold or pneumonia. Fever, cough and trouble breathing are common. These symptoms can appear in as few as 2 days or as long as 14 days after exposure to the virus.

Clients with the following symptoms should be referred to a health care provider or clinic:

- Fever, *plus any of the following:*
- Rapidly worsening illness
- Complaining of being very sick or unable get around as they normally would
- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath.
- Severe cough or severe sore throat
- Chest pain

If the following symptoms are mild, medical attention is not typically required:

- Runny nose or nasal stuffiness
- Mild headache
- Body aches
- Mild GI upset (more often seen in children) or poor appetite.

Please keep in mind that these are basic guidelines. Use your judgment. If your client is over age 60 or has underlying medical problems like diabetes, heart disease or lung disease, or weakened/suppressed immune symptoms, they may be more vulnerable to COVID-19 and its complications.

What to do if a client has symptoms?

- Encourage frequent hand washing or use of hand sanitizer
- Offer tissues, a plastic bag to dispose of tissues, and hand sanitizer to keep near them to help limit their movement in the facility.
- Provide masks for anyone with coughing or sneezing or runny nose
- Do your best to isolate the person from others.
- Encourage drinking fluids, rest or sleep and monitor for worsening symptoms.
- Clients with mild symptoms could get worse so continue to monitor them and refer to care if needed.

Tip # 2: Pay Extra Attention to Your Usual Respiratory Illness Prevention Efforts

- Do your best to separate people with symptoms from healthy people
 - Offer a separate space for eating and resting if you can.
- Post signs that remind people to cover their cough and wash hands
- Encourage clients and staff to wash hands often or use alcohol-based (if possibly in your facility) hand sanitizer.
- Make sure all rest rooms are well stocked with soap and paper towels.
- Provide hand sanitizer at key locations in your agency (by entry, phone, computers, elevators...)
- Cover your cough with inner elbow, inside of shirt/coat collar or tissues.
- Ask clients with symptoms to wear a mask or to cover their cough.
- Avoid touching your face, nose, eyes, and mouth.
- Staff should stay home if they have respiratory symptoms
- Stock up on supplies of tissues and hand sanitizer. Have masks on hand for people with symptoms
- Provide plastic-lined wastebaskets in your facility for used tissues and masks.
- Keep a supply of gloves for staff to use when picking up used tissues or emptying wastebaskets.
- Clean and sanitize frequently touched surfaces several times per shift during cold and flu season.
 - Pay particular attention to doorknobs, banisters, tabletops, and handrails, pens, phones, bathroom fixtures, keyboards etc.

Tip # 3: Stay Informed Monitor the news and any special information or instructions from Public Health. Important news alerts are posted here:

[King County Webpage for Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)

We know that you may have additional questions or concerns about this developing situation, so don't hesitate to contact Seattle King County Public Health and the Department of Community and Human Services at covidhomelessnessresponse@kingcounty.gov

King County Novel Coronavirus Call Center:

If you are in King County and have symptoms of COVID-19, are homeless service provider with questions about COVID-19 or concern about a client, or if you're a healthcare provider with questions about COVID-19, contact our novel coronavirus call center: 206-477-3977.

For general questions about COVID-19 or Washington State's response, please call the Washington State Novel Coronavirus Call Center at 800-525-0127.

Reference: Seattle King County Public Health- Health Care for the Homeless "Swine Flu in the News- What Shelters & Other Homeless Program Need to Know", 4/28/09