



Homeless Service Providers

This tip sheet covers workers and volunteers who provide services to people experiencing unsheltered homelessness and living in encampments, emergency shelters, transitional housing, and other temporary locations.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF AND OTHERS FROM COVID-19

As a worker:

- Stay informed, be prepared, and follow public health advice:
 - Use trusted information sources, such as the Public Health Agency of Canada: www.canada.ca/coronavirus and your local public health authority.
- Monitor yourself for symptoms of COVID-19. If you have symptoms or you're feeling sick:
 - stay at home and away from others.
 - contact your health care provider or local public health authority and follow their advice.
- If you become sick while at work:
 - isolate yourself from others.
 - tell your supervisor that you are going home.
 - do not take public transit if possible.
- Follow the advice of your local public health authority if you have been in contact with someone known or suspected to have COVID-19.
- If you are at higher risk of becoming seriously ill, limit the time you spend outside of your home in the community and avoid crowds as much as possible.
- Keep a physical distance of 2 metres from others when outside your home.
- Practice good hygiene:
 - Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol.
 - Do not touch your face with unwashed hands.
 - Cough or sneeze into the bend of your arm or a tissue.
- Follow advice from your local public health authority, local government, or employer about using a non-medical mask at work. Wearing a non-medical mask or face covering is recommended when you cannot keep 2 metres away from others, especially in crowded places.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched or shared surfaces and objects often.
- Do not share personal items, personal protective equipment, or work tools that are for your use only.



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As an employer:

Actively encourage sick workers to stay home:

- Use a screening questionnaire from a public health agency and remind employees to stay at home if they have symptoms of COVID-19, even if mild.
- Have a flexible attendance policy to allow workers to stay home if they are sick or need to care for a sick family member.

Encourage healthy practices and prevention measures:

- Post signs to remind people to follow these practices and measures. Make sure that signs are suitable for their age, ability, reading level and language preferences.
- Provide increased hand hygiene facilities that are easy to access by everyone, including those with disabilities.
- Encourage workers to clean and disinfect their personal work environments more often and provide them with the supplies to do so.
- Promote physical distancing of 2 metres and set up physical barriers (e.g. plexiglass windows) when this is not possible.
- Involve your health and safety committee or representative when assessing workplace risks and determining personal protective equipment and training.

Meet occupational health and safety obligations:

- Follow all federal, provincial, and municipal health and safety guidelines that apply for your services and activities, such as:
 - Public Health Agency of Canada - Guidance for providers of services for people experiencing homelessness (in the context of COVID-19)
<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/guidance-documents/homelessness.html>
- Do everything reasonably possible under the circumstances to protect the health and safety of your workers and clients by providing information, training, cleaning, disinfecting, and personal protective equipment.
- Perform a hazard identification and risk assessment of your facilities and services to decide where and how to implement protection measures.
- Consult with your local public health unit for location or site-specific recommendations.
- Have a policy to protect workers from violence and harassment. Clients may react aggressively to new protection measures or limited services.



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General Policies and Procedures

- Collaborate with your local public health authority and local government to determine changes to supports, resources, and existing procedures.
- Communicate changes such as new practices, policies, and service limitations that will affect your clients. Provide information using methods easily accessible to your clients.
- Help clients understand that protective measures and reduced services are necessary, and that their experience might be different than what they are used to. Ask them to be considerate of workers, volunteers, and other clients.
- Maintain existing precautions and considerations for marginalized and vulnerable groups (women, youth, LGBTQ2S+, indigenous, medically fragile, mental health, substance addictions, etc.) wherever possible.
- Prepare for possible increased demand for services, requiring additional staff and supplies, and greater co-ordination with community affiliates.
- Incorporate COVID-19 precautions into emergency or first aid response.
- Monitor all workers, clients, and visitors for signs and symptoms of COVID-19.
- Keep attendance records and contact information for all persons on-site should contact tracing or follow-up be required. This includes all employees, volunteers, clients, visitors, and contractors.
- Minimize overcrowding, contact opportunities, and prolonged exposure to others.
- Increase indoor ventilation rates and fresh air return where possible.
- Post signs to remind all persons to follow physical distancing, hand hygiene, and respiratory etiquette.
- Discourage casual touching and hand shaking.
- Discourage singing, yelling, and chanting.
- Control pedestrian flow by entering through one door and exiting out another.
- Guide pedestrian traffic with floor markings, directional arrows, signs, and rope lane barriers.
- Install physical barriers such as clear plastic guards and distancing obstacles, as appropriate, where workers interact with clients and visitors.
- Limit the number of persons gathered at one time, indoors and outdoors. Follow the restrictions set by your province or territory. Assign a worker to control entry and monitor occupancy levels.
- Request that clients stay in assigned areas and do not wander throughout the facility.
- In congregate sleeping areas, arrange bunks so that clients' heads are distanced at least 2 metres apart, oriented head to toe or staggered. The number of bunks may need to be reduced. Bunks might need to be relocated, or additional sleeping areas may need to be re-purposed from other uses. Protective barriers such as plexiglass shields or curtains can be installed between bunks. Do not use bunk beds.
- Consider limiting the time each client may use the facility per day, in order to serve more clients.
- Close or limit access to non-essential areas. Post signs and secure doors and gates if necessary and safe to do so.
- Provide handwashing or sanitizer stations at entries and exits, and throughout the facility.
- Some clients may need additional supervision and assistance with hygiene.
- If there are concerns about unlimited access to alcohol-based products at stations, consider giving individual containers to workers or providing disinfectant wipes instead.
- Reduce the number of surfaces that need to be touched to access buildings and services.
- Discourage people from touching items unless they are using them.
- Use touchless water taps, toilet flushing, hand dryers, doors, and waste bins where possible.



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Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

- Continue to use PPE for existing occupational safety hazards and emergencies, as directed by applicable laws and your employer.
- Situations where PPE may be considered for protection from COVID-19 include:
 - Wearing gloves and other appropriate PPE as recommended by a chemical product's safe work instructions or safety data sheet.
 - Wearing disposable gloves when cleaning blood or body fluids.
 - Where recommended or required by your local health authorities.
- If workers are required to wear PPE, train them on how to wear, remove, work with, and care for the equipment, and to understand its limitations.
- Clean and disinfect any shared PPE before you wear it.
- Wash hands before wearing and after removing PPE.

Non-Medical Masks or Face Coverings

- Follow the mask recommendations from your public health agency or other authority. Note that people may choose to wear masks regardless if there is a formal requirement.
- A mask should not be worn by anyone who is unable to remove it without assistance (e.g., due to their age or ability).
- Wear the mask correctly, making sure the nose and mouth are covered. Do not touch the mask while wearing it.
- Be aware that non-medical masks have limitations, and improper mask use and disposal can increase the risk of infection.
- Change your mask if it becomes wet or soiled. You may wish to bring a second mask in a clean paper bag, envelope, or container that does not trap moisture. Store reusable soiled masks in a separate bag or container. Do not touch the outside of the mask while removing it, and wash your hands when you are finished.
- Consider using a transparent mask or face shield, if appropriate, for customers that may require that visibility.
- Do not allow the mask to be a hazard to other activities, such as getting caught on moving machinery or equipment.

Human Resources

- Notify workers in advance if there are changes to screening measures and policies.
- On arrival each day, check-in and assess all workers, volunteers, and clients using screening criteria developed by a public health authority. Isolate any person with symptoms and conduct a further assessment.
- Discourage workers and volunteers from working at different facilities.
- Adjust worker schedules to reflect any necessary changes.
- If there are fewer workers available, make sure essential roles such as trained supervision, first aid or emergency response persons are still present.
- Make sure workers are trained to work safely, including when replacing the duties of others.
- Minimize contact during sign-in. Have the supervisor sign in for people (or provide separate pens), or have people text the supervisor. Clean any sign-in devices between users.
- Submit documents electronically, or wash hands after handling papers.
- Stagger meetings, breaks, mealtimes, and orientations.
- Work outdoors or remotely when possible.
- Hold meetings in an outside or large space.
- Hold verbal or electronic orientations.
- Limit sharing of equipment where possible, and clean and disinfect between users.



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Cleaning and Disinfecting

- Clean and disinfect shared work areas, facilities, vehicles, and tools between users or shifts.
- Clean and disinfect all commonly touched objects and surfaces such as doors, counters, chairs, handles, railings, touchscreens, phones, light switches, and faucets or taps.
- Protective barriers such as plexiglass shields or curtains between bunks should be cleaned and disinfected frequently.
- Clean and disinfect individual rooms and furniture between clients.
- Remove soft furnishings and objects that cannot be easily cleaned.
- Wash shelter clothing and linens between uses.
- Make sure that donated clothing and linens are washed and minimally handled before distributing to clients.
- Clean washrooms and showers more frequently. Provide running water, soap, paper towels, cleaning supplies, and a plastic lined waste container.
- Use household or commercial disinfectants to destroy or inactivate the virus:
 - Use a disinfectant with a drug identification number (DIN). This number means that it has been approved for use in Canada.
 - If household or commercial disinfectant cleaning products are not available, hard surfaces can be disinfected using a mixture of 5 mL of bleach (5% sodium hypochlorite) and 250 mL of water. Make sure the solution is in contact with the surface for 1 minute.
 - If liquids can be withstood, disinfect high-touch electronic devices (e.g., touchscreens, pin pads, keyboards, phones) with alcohol or disinfectant wipes.
- Document that facilities are being cleaned and disinfected regularly using checklists or logbooks.
- Wear appropriate PPE such as gloves suitable for the cleaning agent.
- Use a dedicated cloth for cleaning.
- Clean so that when the surface is wiped, the surface still appears wet.
- Make sure workers or volunteers understand the risks, have received training, and understand the safety precautions for all cleaning methods and required PPE.
- Dispose of used tissues, wipes, gloves, and other cleaning materials in a plastic lined waste container. Use disposable gloves when handling garbage.

Testing and Isolation

Work with your public health authority and local health care providers to provide access to COVID-19 assessment centres or to provide medical care on-site where possible. For clients who require self-isolation support due to exposure, symptoms, or a positive diagnosis:

- For persons waiting for test results, provide separate isolation quarters if possible, or a daily check-in location with instructions to avoid contact with other persons and facilities until their results are available. Isolate clients in separate cohort housing or individual rooms.
- Provide separate washroom and shower facilities.
- Provide separate eating facilities or bring meals to their accommodations.
- If your shelter does not have the means to provide separate isolation zones, co-ordinate housing with community affiliates (such as public health agencies, civic and community centers, recreational facilities, faith-based organizations, hotels, and modular unit agencies).
- When collecting soiled linens or clothing, bag it for transportation to the laundry and do not shake it.
- Assess client health conditions daily and have a plan if transfer to a medical facility is required.
- Provide secure storage for clients' personal belongings if they must be isolated or relocated.



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Services and Activities

- Assess all of the services and activities that occur at your facility (housing, washrooms and showers, medical and social services, laundry, food, basic needs supply distribution, recreation, education, social events, equipment use, storage, worker and client transportation, etc.) and modify them appropriately.
- Reduce services and activities if physical distancing and cleaning and disinfection cannot be maintained. If group activities take place, do so with the smallest number of participants possible. Consider more frequent services to help maintain distancing. Pre-screen participants.
- Do not provide communal food or beverage services. If providing food, offer meals as pre-wrapped, takeout, or contactless delivery. Consider closing or limiting indoor sit-down eating areas, while expanding outdoor areas with well-spaced seating.
- Provide basic needs supplies such as non-medical masks and hand sanitizer or soap.
- Provide dedicated times for services or activities for more vulnerable groups such as seniors.
- Clean and disinfect all activity spaces, equipment, and supplies between users.

Families and Youth

- Isolate families in separate cohort housing or individual accommodations if possible.
- Provide appropriate basic needs supplies such as baby food and diapers, especially if supplies are limited in your area or if other agencies are closed (e.g., food banks), as appropriate.
- Provide access to entertainment and outdoor exercise if possible.
- Assign toys to each child or family group for the duration of their visit in a labelled bin.
- Clean and disinfect shared toys and play equipment frequently.
- Remove toys that are difficult to clean or quarantine them for a week between clients.

Mobile Outreach

- Wear a non-medical mask and use hand sanitizer between each client contact.
- Maintain existing safety and health precautions.
- Clean the vehicle interior between users, especially touch surfaces (steering wheel, dials and buttons, levers, door handles, seatbelt, etc.).
- Do not allow clients into your vehicle.
- Avoid entering housing. Provide services outdoors or under an open shelter where possible.
- Set up a waiting area, encourage physical distancing and mark spacing.
- Pre-package supplies and hand them out to minimize contact.
- Communicate to vulnerable populations:
 - Changes to regular outreach schedules and services.
 - Updates on outbreaks in their community.
 - How to avoid exposure (respiratory and hand hygiene measures, use of non-medical masks, physical distancing, avoiding public transit).
 - How and where to access testing locations, shelter facilities, services, food and supplies, counselling, and medical care.
 - How to access COVID-19 government financial assistance programs.



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External Service Providers

For visits by specialist services such as social workers, mental health, pharmacy, substance use, harm reduction, childcare, police, medical response, deliveries, contractors, and others:

- Maintain physical distancing as much as possible, minimize exposure of workers and clients, wear non-medical masks, and provide hand washing facilities.
- Clean and disinfect the work area before and after the external service provider does their work.
- Provide a designated meeting room or area with minimal furniture.
- Communicate with service providers about your requirements, and work with them to assist with their requirements.
- Use contactless service and payment wherever possible.

Coping with Social Isolation, Microaggression or Stigma

- When helping others, encourage them to talk to someone trained in mental health first aid, or someone else they trust about what they are experiencing.
- If an employee, ask the individual to contact their supervisor, employer, or employee assistance service, if available.
- Contact your local public health or community resources that offer mental health services.
- Check out organizations online:
 - Canadian Mental Health Association <https://cmha.ca/news/covid-19-and-mental-health>
 - Canadian Psychological Association <https://cpa.ca/psychologyfactsheets/>
 - Kids Help Phone <https://kidshelpphone.ca/get-info/were-here-for-you-during-covid-19-novel-coronavirus/>

If you or someone you know is in crisis, please contact to your local hospital, call 911 immediately, or contact a Crisis Centre in your area. <https://suicideprevention.ca/need-help/>

It is important that mental health resources and support are provided to all employees, including access to an Employee Assistance Program (EAP).



For further information on COVID-19, refer to the Public Health Agency of Canada <https://www.canada.ca/coronavirus>

Note that this guidance is just some of the adjustments organizations can make during a pandemic. Adapt this list by adding your own good practices and policies to meet your organization's specific needs.