



State of California

# BUSINESS, CONSUMER SERVICES AND HOUSING AGENCY

Gavin Newsom, Governor  
Lourdes M. Castro Ramírez, Secretary

**TO:** Homeless Assistance Providers  
**FROM:** California Business, Consumer Services and Housing Agency  
**DATE:** March 10, 2020  
**SUBJECT:** Guidance for Homeless Assistance Providers on Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)

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This guidance is based on what is currently known about the transmission and severity of Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) disease and is directed to homeless assistance providers in California.

## Background

COVID-19 is a respiratory illness caused by a novel virus that has been spreading worldwide. Community-acquired cases have now been confirmed in California. We are gaining more understanding of COVID-19's epidemiology, clinical course, immunogenicity and other factors as time progresses, and the situation is changing daily. The California Department of Public Health (CDPH) is monitoring COVID-19, conducting testing with local and federal partners, and providing guidance and resources to prevent, detect and respond to the occurrence of COVID-19 cases in California.

## Illness Severity

The complete clinical picture regarding COVID-19 is not fully understood. Reported illnesses have ranged from mild to severe, including illness resulting in death. Older people and people with certain underlying health conditions like heart disease, lung disease and diabetes, for example, seem to be at greater risk of serious illness.

## Context

Because of the higher likelihood of pre-existing health conditions and the transient nature of the homeless population, people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, and the people who interact with this population, may have an increased risk of COVID-19 infection and greater potential to increase COVID-19 transmission.

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The goals of this guidance are: (1) to protect persons experiencing homelessness, employees of homeless assistance providers, and people who come into contact with persons experiencing homelessness from COVID-19 infection and (2) to reduce community transmission and introductions of COVID-19 into new communities.

## **Basic Guidance**

The guidance that the public has been receiving applies to homeless assistance providers and people others who come into contact with homeless individuals. They include:

- **Wash hands frequently with soap and water**  
*Wash your hands with soap and water regularly. Wash for at least 20 seconds.*
- **Cover a cough or sneeze**  
*Cover your cough or sneeze with your sleeve or disposable tissue.*
- **Don't touch**  
*Avoid touching eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands*
- **Keep your distance**  
*Avoid close contact with people who are sick*
- **Stay home if you are sick**  
*If you experience respiratory symptoms like a fever or cough, stay home.*
- **Get help**  
*If you experience symptoms of COVID-19, call your health care provider.*

Additional guidance and other information about COVID-19 can be found on the [California Department of Public Health's website](#).

## **Specific Guidance for Homeless Service Providers**

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has issued [guidance for homeless assistance providers](#) to plan and respond to COVID-19. It is summarized below.

### **Plan**

Continuums of Care (CoCs), city and county homelessness officials and their partners should prepare now to protect people experiencing homelessness, homeless service provider staff, and volunteers from COVID-19. Specific steps include:

- Establishing ongoing communication with local public health departments and connecting to community-wide planning.

- Developing or updating an emergency operations plan, which includes key contacts, a list of healthcare facilities, and contingency plans for dealing with increased absenteeism.
- Addressing key prevention strategies, such as best practices for preventing the transmission and spread of COVID-19.
- Providing prevention supplies, such as alcohol-based hand sanitizers, tissues, trash baskets, disposable facemasks (to be used only by sick individuals in your organization), and mobile hand washing stations.
- Procedures for reporting suspected COVID-19 cases to local health officials.
- Identifying spaces that can be used to accommodate unsheltered people with mild respiratory symptoms and those at significantly elevated risk of infection who have no option to self-quarantine outdoors.
- Those who are sick should be immediately isolated from those who are not sick and given a clean disposable facemask to wear while staying at the shelter.
- Identifying clients who could be at high risk for complications.
- Do not refer individuals to emergency rooms or physician offices unless the individual is experiencing shortness of breath or other complications. Make sure to notify the healthcare facility and transport personnel in advance.

### **Communicate**

CoCs, city and county homelessness officials and their partners should communicate frequently about COVID-19 and everyday preventive actions. To do this, they should:

- Create a communications plan for providing timely information to the general public as well as to unsheltered homeless individuals
- Identify and address potential language, cultural and disability barriers
- Counter stigmatization and discrimination

Other resources from the CDC include:

- [CDC: Interim Guidance for Homeless Service Providers to Plan and Respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [Questions to Assist CoCs and Public Health Authorities to Limit the Spread of Infectious Disease in Homeless Programs](#)
- [Specific Considerations for Public Health Authorities to Limit Infection Risk Among People Experiencing Homelessness](#)

- [Eligible ESG costs for Infectious Disease Preparedness](#)
- [CDC: Interim Environmental Cleaning and Disinfection Recommendations for US Community Facilities with Suspected/Confirmed Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#)

Guidance from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development has also developed [specific guidelines](#) homeless assistance providers. These include an [Infectious Disease Toolkit for Continuums of Care \(CoCs\)](#), an [Ask A Question \(AAQ\) Portal](#), and other resources.

All homeless assistance providers, including (CoCs), city and county homelessness officials, and their partners should make themselves familiar with the HUD publication [Preventing and Managing the Spread of Infectious Disease for People Experiencing Homelessness](#). This document covers preparation including planning, and training and education; mitigation activities; and response to an infectious disease outbreak.

CoCs, city and county homelessness officials, shelter operators and case workers, city and county public health officials, and local law enforcement may also wish to consult two other HUD publications: [Preventing and Managing the Spread of Infectious Disease within Shelters](#) and [Preventing and Managing the Spread of Infectious Disease within Encampments](#).

*Please note that, per HUD guidance, shelter providers should consult with their local health department before turning away individuals with respiratory symptoms. If an individual requires medical attention, providers should continue to direct them to a healthcare provider.*

Questions? Contact the Homeless Coordinating and Financing Council at [HCFC@bcsh.ca.gov](mailto:HCFC@bcsh.ca.gov).