COVID-19 Guidance for Shelters and Housing Settings

What is COVID-19?
The Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) is known to cause infection of the respiratory system. Those who are infected with COVID-19 may have little to no symptoms or may not know they have symptoms because they are similar to a cold or flu. Symptoms, including fever, cough, difficulty breathing and pneumonia, may take up to 14 days to appear after exposure to COVID-19. For more information about COVID-19, visit OttawaPublicHealth.ca/Coronavirus.

COVID-19 is most commonly spread person-to-person, from an infected person through:

- respiratory droplets generated when an infected person coughs or sneezes
- close, prolonged personal contact,
- touching something with the virus on it, then touching your mouth, nose or eyes before washing your hands. There is evidence to suggest that, in the right conditions, COVID-19 could survive on surfaces for a number of days.

Current Recommendations for Shelters and Housing
As cases of COVID-19 have been confirmed in Ottawa, Ottawa Public Health (OPH), in collaboration with Ottawa Inner City Health (OICH), is recommending that all housing settings take the following actions:

- Support and encourage behaviours to reduce the spread of germs
- Support self-isolation when needed
- Protecting Staff by ensuring an adequate stock of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and its proper use and the Proper use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)
- Enhanced cleaning and disinfecting

Reducing the spread:
To reduce the spread of germs, including the flu and COVID-19, OPH and OICH recommends that everyone:

- Wash their hands often with soap and water, or use hand sanitizer
- Avoid touching their eyes, nose, and mouth unless you have just cleaned your hands
- Cover their cough and sneeze with a tissue or into their arm, not their hand
- If possible, stay home if they are sick
- Avoid visiting people in hospitals or long-term care centres if they are sick
- Consider social distancing (ideally 2 metres)
The practice of **physical (social) distancing** is that everyone keeps a 2 metre (6 feet) distance from each other. While this may be difficult when working in crowded shelter-settings with clients who may not remember to distance themselves, it is important to remind everyone of this precaution.

Enhance hand hygiene practices and avoid touching your face. Ensure that after items or surfaces are touched that staff wash their hands or use hand sanitizer. Be sure to wash your hands each time there is direct contact with a client.

To encourage these precautions, we ask that you please put up the attached social distancing sign from Ottawa Public Health as well as the signage found on OPH’s website. These signs are offered in different languages that address the following topics:
- Handwashing
- Hand sanitizing
- Cough etiquette and other precautions

**Self-Isolation**

OPH and OICH are working hard to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in Ottawa shelters. As part of this process, diligence and support may be needed with respect to temporarily self-isolating people with symptoms or recent travel until such time that COVID-19 can be ruled out. While fever, cough and difficulty breathing are common in the shelter community, clients may be asked to self isolate and then be released very quickly once their condition is evaluated. Please do not be alarmed by this approach – while it is cautious, it does not mean everyone requested to be self-isolated has tested positive for COVID-19.

**Protecting Staff and the Use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)**

As maintaining stock of PPE is of the utmost importance, its use in shelter and housing settings should be carefully assessed to ensure it is available in those situations that require it.

If social distancing can be maintained or if staff do not have direct contact with a client, PPE may not be needed. Examples of scenarios where PPE is not needed may include: staff working at a front desk reception area behind glass, staff cooking in the kitchen, staff working to clean a room that does not house clients, staff working in administration without contact with clients. If there is minimal client contact, (e.g. staff serving food from behind a hot table), staff should ensure they still practice and maintain good hand hygiene by frequently washing their hands with soap and water, or by using hand sanitizer.

In scenarios where staff have considerable client contact and are providing direct care (e.g. cleaning in a room with clients who may be showing symptoms, physically helping
clients dress, etc.) a mask, gown, eye protection and gloves are recommended to prevent droplet transmission.

In situations that require direct and/or close exposure (e.g. reversing an overdose, providing CPR), a mask, eye protection, gloves and gown are highly recommended. If responding to a life-threatening or emergency situation that does not allow the time for full PPE, staff should prioritize a mask and eye protection, and be sure to wash their hands and change clothes immediately after the intervention. Please note, Ottawa Public Health always recommends wearing all the appropriate PPE to ensure personal protection. If staff are unable to don all the PPE required, they will be conducting their own personal risk assessment.

To dispose of PPE after use: Take off the gloves first and clean your hands with soap and water before taking off eye protection/face-shield and gown (if worn) and then wash your hands again before taking of your mask. Dispose of PPE right away in a wastebasket lined with a plastic bag. Once all PPE is removed and disposed of, clean your hands again.

If you are unsure as to whether you should be using PPE in a situation, please consult your Supervisor/Manager.

Frequent hand washing is recommended for all staff. If staff are going to be in contact with surfaces that others may have touched and are not confident that they have been cleaned, it is important they wash their hands immediately. For example, if changing beds in an empty room, staff should not throw the linen around, but instead consider wearing a gown or coveralls, as well as gloves. Folding the linen into the middle of the bed and picking it up carefully is highly recommended.

**Enhanced Cleaning and Disinfecting**

In addition to the above precautions, OPH and OICH are also recommending that shelter and housing settings complete the following enhanced cleaning practices to support infection prevention and control as COVID-19 is spread by droplets:

- Ensure an adequate supply of paper towels and soap
- Clean and disinfect high-touch surfaces at a minimum of twice a day (doorknobs, hand railing, light switches, elevator buttons, sitting areas etc.)
- Use an appropriate cleaner and disinfectant, as per manufacturer’s instructions
- Remove hard to clean and disinfect items

For more information on cleaning and disinfecting, please visit the following OPH websites:

[Cleaning and disinfection checklist](#)
Environmental cleaning and disinfection in childcare centres and schools (These guidelines can apply to various settings including housing settings)

Cleaning and disinfecting of toys

Supporting each other and our community

We understand that this is a challenging time, but measures like this are needed to ensure that the spread of COVID-19 in our community is limited. We thank you for the important and vital service that you provide to our community.

Please visit COVID-19 for workplaces for more information.

Stay healthy and take care of each other.