



## COVID-19 & Homelessness: Infection Prevention & Control

*People experiencing homelessness often have underlying health conditions and are unable to implement public health recommendations due to social and economic circumstances. For these reasons, people experiencing homelessness are at higher risk of contracting COVID-19 or developing complications due to COVID-19.*

Services that support people experiencing homelessness, including Friendship Centres have increased risk of a COVID-19 outbreak. Measures must be in place to control and prevent an outbreak. One measure is implementing infection prevention and control strategies on several levels including: **environmental, staff/volunteers, food handling and community members.**

### Environmental

- Sleeping areas (for those who are **NOT** experiencing respiratory symptoms) should have beds/mats placed at least 6 feet apart. In areas where community members are staying with respiratory illness also use barriers between beds/mats (ie. plastic sheeting). Bunk beds should not be used in either case.
- Designate a separate bathroom for those with COVID-19 symptoms to use.
- Stock bathrooms with soap and drying material for hand washing.
- Provide alcohol-based hand sanitizers that contain at least 60% alcohol at key points within the Friendship Centre (ie. front desk, entrance/exit)
- Post signs at entrances and in strategic places providing instruction on hand hygiene, respiratory hygiene, and cough etiquette.
- Provide community members with access to tissues and plastic bags for the proper disposal of used tissues.
- No-touch garbage cans are preferred for the disposal of items.
- Use cleaning products that clean and disinfect. Visit <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/disinfectants/covid-19.html> for approved disinfectants.
  - Cleaning products remove germs, but does not kill them. By removing them, it lowers their numbers and risk of spreading infection.
  - Disinfecting products kill germs using chemicals. Ensure manufacturer recommended wet-contact time is achieved. Wet contact time is the minimum time required for items to be in contact with the disinfectant to ensure germs are killed.
- Establish routine cleaning processes.
  - Surfaces that are frequently touched and shared spaces (ie. bathrooms, kitchens) should be cleaned and disinfected more often.
  - Use damp cleaning methods (ie. damp clean cloth, wet mop). Do not dust or sweep which can distribute virus droplets into the air.

- Contaminated disposable cleaning items (ie. mop heads, cloths) should be placed in a lined garbage bin before disposing of them with regular waste. Reusable cleaning items can be washed using regular laundry soap and hot water (60-90°C).
- Place any equipment cleaned on a clean surface to air dry. Do not actively dry with a towel or other device.
- Clean and disinfect sleeping mats after every use.
- Wash bedding frequently and keep dirty and clean laundry separate.
- Place possibly contaminated laundry into a container with a plastic liner and do not shake.
  - Wash with regular laundry soap and hot water (60-90 C) and dry well.
  - Clothing and linens belonging to the ill person can be washed with other laundry.

### Staff/Volunteers

- Wear gloves and gowns when cleaning, including laundry. Wash hands with soap and water or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer before and after removing gloves.
  - The labels of the cleaning and disinfecting products you are using will likely identify what protective equipment staff or volunteers should use
- Staff/volunteers should wash their hands frequently with soap and warm water. This includes when they first arrive at the Friendship Centre, before preparing food, after any contact with saliva or nasal secretions (ie. used tissues), after handling community member belongings, after cleaning activities, and after using the washroom.
- If using disposable gloves for any tasks, handwashing is still important and should be done before putting on and after removing the gloves. If using gloves, change often, especially if soiled, ripped or become dirty.
- Educate staff/volunteers about COVID-19 prevention.
  - Hand washing
  - Cough etiquette
  - Social distancing
  - Avoid touching face
  - Avoid sharing personal items
  - Stay home when sick
    - Staff/volunteers should check for any symptoms before reporting to work and use the **“COVID-19 Self-Assessment Tool” as needed.**
- Educate staff/volunteers on how to screen community members upon arrival to the Friendship Centre or shelter space using AHS’s **“COVID-19 Self-Assessment Tool”** <https://myhealth.alberta.ca/Journey/COVID-19/Pages/COVID-Self-Assessment.aspx>
  - Encourage community members to report any symptoms right away.
- Educate staff/volunteers on what to do if a staff or client has symptoms.
- Staff/volunteers should encourage and role model social distancing.
- Staff/volunteers should **NOT** be designated as caregivers for symptomatic community members. If staff/volunteers are not able to maintain a 2 meter distance between themselves and those who are symptomatic, contact the Public Health.
- Monitor or connect with community members who could be at higher risk for complications from COVID-19 (those who are older or have underlying health conditions) and reach out to

them regularly. Ensure they are informed about the symptoms of COVID-19 and how they may protect themselves through social distancing.

- Monitor for signs of illness among community members, especially new cough, fever, or shortness of breath.

### **Food Handling**

Germs from symptomatic staff/volunteers/community members or from contaminated surfaces can be transferred to food or serving utensils. Measures should be implemented to minimize handling of shared food and items that may touch another person's food.

- Provide hand sanitizer before every meal.
- Dispense food directly on to plates or have pre-packaged meals.
- Minimize handling of multiple sets of cutlery.
- Remove shared food containers (ie. pitchers of water, salt and pepper shakers etc).
- Dispense only pre-packaged snacks directly to community members.
- Ensure that the staff/volunteers handling food are not symptomatic and practice good hand hygiene.
- Ensure that all surfaces of the tables and chairs (including the underneath edge of the chair seat) are cleaned and disinfected after each meal.
- If possible, staff assigned to cleaning duties should not be involved in food preparation or food service.

### **Community Members**

- Community members must maintain social distancing of 2 meters.
- Encourage community members to report any symptoms right away.
- Educate community members on COVID-19 prevention.
  - Hand washing
  - Cough etiquette
  - Social distancing
  - Avoid touching face
  - Avoid sharing personal items