



## Infection Control for Shelters

To prevent or minimize the spread of contagious diseases such as Norovirus, the flu, COVID-19, and tuberculosis, infection control practices should be in place even though the shelter may not be able to provide traditional healthcare services. This document provides a very basic framework for establishing and supporting environmental controls to prevent or limit the spread of communicable disease. However, it is critical to work with the Houston Health Department as situations may change during the operation of the shelter.

### SCREENING

***Screen all shelter occupants (residents, staff, volunteers, and visitors) for signs of illness as recommended by the City of Houston Health Department.***

#### Set Up the Screening Area

- ☐ Provide an intake area and waiting room for screening during registration.
- ☐ Use trained medical or healthcare staff to conduct the screening with additional trained personnel available to reduce wait times.
- ☐ Provide handwashing station or alcohol-based hand sanitizer (at least 60% alcohol), tissues, and wastebaskets.
- ☐ Erect a physical barrier (glass/plastic window or partition that can protect the faces of screeners who are checking temperatures), if possible.

#### **OR**

If no physical barrier is possible, provide Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for the screener (face mask, eye protection/face shields, disposable gloves).

- ☐ Provide face masks to persons upon entry to the shelter if they do not have their own.
- ☐ Set up waiting area with chairs 6 feet apart.
- ☐ Schedule cleaning and disinfection of the screening area (shelter occupant's seat, table, barrier, contact thermometer, and any other surface the occupant contacted) after every seating.

#### Screen for COVID-19

- ☐ Screen all persons entering the shelter (residents, volunteers, visitors, and staff) using the [Screening Procedures for COVID-19](#).
  - o Screen food workers and health/medical staff if screening all persons is not possible
- ☐ Send staff, volunteers, and visitors home immediately who screen positive for COVID-19 symptoms.
- ☐ Group screened residents into the following three categories:
  - o **Not sick**
  - o **Sick**
    - Provide a face mask if tolerated (with the exception of persons under the age of two,

- having trouble breathing, or who are incapacitated).
- Educate the resident on cough etiquette and provide tissues if a face mask cannot be used.
- Direct the resident to the designated isolation area for COVID-19 or to another previously designated location
- **Needs immediate attention**
  - Call 911 for medical transport and tell the operator that the individual is a probable COVID-19 case.
- ☐ Record possible COVID-19 cases and share with the City of Houston Health Department on a daily basis.
- ☐ If testing for COVID-19, test high-risk residents if available resources are limited.

## THROUGHOUT THE SHELTER

### Monitor for Illness

- ☐ Monitor all shelter occupants (staff, volunteers, visitors and residents) daily for symptoms of COVID-19 and other illnesses and follow the above procedures for sending persons with symptoms of illness to the appropriate isolation area (residents) or home (all others – staff, volunteers, guests).

### Educate Residents and Staff

- ☐ Educate shelter occupants (staff, residents, volunteers) on the importance of wearing face masks at all times except:
  - When showering or eating
  - Children under the age of 2
  - Anyone who has trouble breathing or is unable to remove the mask without assistance
- ☐ Educate parents and caregivers regarding:
  - Managing their stress and that of their children ([CDC-Coping with Stress](#))
  - Watching for and reporting symptoms of COVID-19 in their children
  - Keeping children at least 6 feet from other residents
  - The importance of proper handwashing
- ☐ Encourage sheltered residents and workers to report symptoms of infectious diseases between screenings.
- ☐ Post signs throughout the shelter that non-English speaking persons and those with low literacy can understand regarding:
  - The common symptoms of COVID-19
  - The importance of wearing a face mask
  - Social distancing
  - Following proper respiratory etiquette
  - Washing hand frequently and properly
  - Reporting symptoms of illness

Refer to [CDC Printable Educational Materials](#) for downloadable signs and communication tools

## ISOLATION AREA

### Select and Layout the Isolation Area(s)

- ☐ Locate an isolation area of separate rooms or a curtained area that is for the exclusive use of ill persons and is:
  - o Separated from public living and sleeping areas
  - o Under control by medical personnel
  - o Clearly marked as restricted access
  - o On the lowest floor if possible to be closest to entrances/exits and facility's operations
- ☐ Ensure each isolation area has:
  - o Easily cleanable floors
  - o Good ventilation (extremely important during the COVID-19 pandemic)
  - o Private access to and use of hand sinks, toilets, and showers if possible  
**OR**, if not possible  
Designated hand sinks, toilets, and showers within general population areas labeled for isolation use
  - o At least three beds (depending upon the size of the shelter) with the potential to hold more sick beds
  - o Handwashing/sanitizing stations at each entrance and exit to and from the isolation area
  - o A dedicated area for donning and taking off PPE
- ☐ Space beds 6 feet apart, head to toe.
  - o Cover beds or mattresses with a barrier if possible (waterproof mat/sheet, absorbent pad, plastic).
- ☐ During the COVID-19 pandemic:
  - o Provide individual rooms to isolate ill residents if possible.  
**OR**  
Provide temporary hard, non-porous barriers between beds spaced 6 feet apart if separate rooms are not available.
  - o Clean and disinfect restrooms after each use by a COVID-19 patient.

## Develop Plans and Stock Supplies

- ☐ Develop plans/protocols to:
  - o Transport seriously ill/injured occupants to healthcare facilities
  - o Train isolation staff in donning and taking off PPE
  - o Minimize the number of times staff leave the isolation area
- ☐ Provide the isolation area with:
  - o Soap, paper towels, waste receptacles, and signs promoting handwashing
  - o Hand sanitizing station(s)
  - o Sharps container
  - o Waste receptacles designated for medical waste and separated from general refuse
  - o Fully stocked first aid kits, Automatic External Defibrillator (AED), additional face masks, facial tissues

## Consider Cleaning and Disposal Arrangements

- ☐ Protect cots or mattresses with waterproof mats/sheets or absorbent pads and follow the procedures for cleaning and disinfecting cots and bedding.
- ☐ Provide sharps containers for the disposal of syringes and needles used for medications.

- ☐ Ensure secured location for the storage of biohazardous waste until it can be picked up by designated personnel.
- ☐ Designate cleaning equipment/supplies and storage location.

## Monitor the Isolation Area

- ☐ Provide ill residents with facial tissues, extra blankets, and plastic bags to contain vomit.
- ☐ Educate ill residents to:
  - o Not leave the isolation area except to use the restroom
  - o Notify shelter staff if symptoms worsen
  - o Keep at least 6 feet away from other residents in the isolation area
  - o Wear a face mask at all times except when eating, showering, or having difficulty breathing
- ☐ Keep ill residents (not affected by COVID-19) in the isolation area until symptoms have ceased for 24 hours without medication unless otherwise directed by medical personnel.
- ☐ Follow guidance provided by the City of Houston Health Department for when residents with known or symptoms of COVID-19 may discontinue isolation.

## PROTECT MEDICAL/SHELTER STAFF FROM COVID-19

- ☐ Furnish the following PPE to staff providing medical care to residents with known or suspected COVID-19 where contact less than 6 feet cannot be avoided:
  - o Eye protection/face shield, N95 or higher-level respirator (or surgical mask if respirators are not available or staff are not fit-tested), disposable gowns, and disposable gloves
- ☐ Furnish shelter staff who enter the isolation area for reasons other than medical care such as persons delivering meals, with a N95 or surgical mask.

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