

Supporting COVID-19 Positive and/or Symptomatic Guests within Congregate Shelters

A Guide from Public Health – Seattle & King County

Updated December 30, 2021

If your site is supporting a guest who has COVID-19 symptoms or a positive COVID-19 test result:

1. **First, move the guest into a space separated away from others and ensure that they wear a mask.**
2. **Once they are safely isolated, call the King County COVID-19 Call Center for support, at 206-477-3977 (open 8AM-10PM, 365 days a year)**
3. **COVID-19 positive guests are prioritized for referral to King County's Isolation and Quarantine site (IQ) as capacity allows.**
4. **Please see the guidance below on how to reduce risk when supporting a positive or symptomatic guest within your site if IQ is unavailable. Public Health – Seattle & King County's HEART team (chs.heart@kingcounty.gov) can offer support and consultation during regular business hours.**

Key priorities:

- Aim to provide a separate sleeping space, ideally with a designated bathroom for COVID-19 positive guests when possible
- Emphasize universal mask use for all staff, volunteers and guests
- Improve indoor air ventilation as much as possible
- Limit visitors who are not guests, staff, or essential volunteers
- Maintain cleaning and disinfection
- Ensure wrap-around services remain available for guests as much as possible
- Screen guests, staff, and volunteers for symptoms and make referrals for medical care if needed

Use standard facility procedures to determine whether a guest needs medical attention.

Call 911 if a guest has emergency warning signs of COVID-19:

- Trouble breathing
- Persistent pain or pressure in the chest
- New confusion or the inability to arouse
- Pale, gray or blue-colored skin, lips, or nail beds, depending on skin tone.

Call 911 for any other symptoms that are severe or concerning to you. Notify 911 dispatch and EMS personnel that the guest might have COVID-19.

Section 1: For Confirmed COVID-19 Positive Guests

Step 1: Identify an Isolation Area in the Shelter

When no alternate housing sites (including IQ) are available, the shelter operators should isolate the COVID-19 positive guest(s) away from others as much as possible within the shelter.

- Prioritize COVID-19 positive guests for individual rooms (e.g. private rooms or an office).
- If multiple residents have tested positive, these residents may stay in the same isolation area. Identify a large well-ventilated room separate from the rest of the shelter. If all clients in the designated isolation room/area are positive, bed placement between COVID-19 positive residents can be closer than 6ft.
- If a private room is not available, isolate COVID-19 positive guests away from others as best as possible. Consider using a large well-ventilated room or designate a section of the room.
- Keep doors closed to designated isolation rooms/areas, when possible. Avoid airflow from isolation areas into non-isolation areas.
- Designate a separate bathroom (as close as possible to the isolation area) that may be used by guests who have tested positive. Deliver meals to individuals staying in the isolation room/area to reduce movement onsite.
- Restrict visitors from entering the isolation room/area.

Step 2: Designate Staff

When possible, designate staff to support the isolation room/area.

- Minimize the number of unvaccinated staff members and volunteers who have face-to-face interactions with guests who have tested positive for COVID-19.
- Limit the movement of those designated staff to decrease the risk of COVID-19 spreading to other parts of the facility
- Only staff providing essential care should enter the isolation room/area, and should maximize physical distancing while supporting guests (with non-contact food delivery, for example). Staff should maintain physical distance between all other staff, guests and volunteers as much as possible.
- Prioritize staff who are N95 fit tested for respirators to work in isolation area.

Step 3: Provide PPE & Encourage Testing

Regardless of vaccination status, **all staff and volunteers** should continue wearing well-fitted masks in homeless shelters, even if they are fully vaccinated.

Personal protective equipment:

Ensure ample Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) supply on site.

- Order PPE from vendors if supply is low
- Public Health can offer short-term PPE supplies for urgent, emergency scenarios. Call the King County COVID-19 Call Center (206-477-3977) for assistance.

For situations where staff would be in close contact (within 6 feet) of guests with suspected or confirmed COVID-19, staff should at a minimum wear:

- Eye protection (goggles or face shield),
- An N95 (ideally fit-tested), or KN95 respirator (or a surgical mask if a respirator is unavailable). Cloth masks should not be worn by staff who have close contact with COVID-19 positive clients.
- Disposable gown
- Disposable gloves
- Practice proper donning (putting on) and doffing (removing) of PPE to reduce self-contamination. Click [here for CDC guidance](#).

Testing:

Encourage staff to participate in COVID-19 testing as often as resources allow (consider at least weekly).

- If testing access is limited, prioritize routine testing for exposed staff.
- If staff develop symptoms at work, they should leave the site immediately isolate at home away from others and seek testing or medical evaluation if needed. If the staff lives at the site, then follow isolation guidance for guests. Staff who are COVID-19 positive or have symptoms should not report to work.

Step 4: Support Guests

Masks: Regardless of vaccination status, ensure **all guests** wear well-fitting masks while indoors, except if medically contraindicated, or while sleeping.

For COVID-19 positive guests:

Monitor for worsening symptoms: Use standard facility procedures to determine whether a client needs immediate medical attention.

Call 911 if the guest has emergency warning signs of COVID-19:

- Trouble breathing
- Persistent pain or pressure in the chest
- New confusion or the inability to arouse
- Pale, gray or blue-colored skin, lips, or nail beds, depending on skin tone.

Call 911 for any other symptoms that are severe/concerning to you. Notify 911 dispatch and EMS that the client has COVID-19.

Minimize the number of other people that COVID-19 positive guests have contact with:

- Restrict visitors from entering the isolation room/area.
- Only staff providing essential care should enter the isolation room/area.
- Deliver meals to designated area to reduce client movement within the shelter.
- If the positive case needs to leave the building for any reason, designate a path through the building, prioritizing back doors, halls or stairwells. Consider escorting them through the shelter, maintaining physical distancing. Ensure the path limits contact with others.

- Consider designating 3 separate smoking areas; one for positive cases, one for symptomatic clients not yet tested and one for negative/asymptomatic clients.
- Only staff providing essential care should enter the isolation room/area and should maximize physical distancing while supporting guests (with non-contact food delivery for example).

For all other guests:

Monitor for symptoms:

- Monitor all other guests for symptoms. If a guest develops symptoms, isolate them from others and test for COVID-19.
- Do not move the untested symptomatic guest into the isolation area with the COVID-19 positive guests without a positive result. If you are unable to complete testing, identify a second area to isolate suspected/symptomatic guests away from others. See Section 2 below for guidance for untested symptomatic guests.

Encourage testing:

- Encourage guests to participate in COVID-19 testing as often as resources allow (consider at least weekly).
- If testing access is limited, prioritize testing symptomatic guests first, then exposed asymptomatic guests, then non-exposed asymptomatic guests.
- Reach out to Public Health for testing resources and support, using the [PHSKC COVID-19 Intake Form](#)

Step 5: Facility Considerations

Ventilation:

Improve ventilation within the facility wherever possible. Public Health – Seattle & King County's HEART team can offer support with identifying ways to improve ventilation. The team can be reached at chs.heart@kingcounty.gov

See additional guidance at [Public Health- Seattle & King County Improving Indoor Air](#)

Consider:

- Setting up HEPA air purifiers as soon as possible if you have not already done so
- Allow restroom exhaust fans to operate non-stop and at full capacity
- Operate kitchen hood systems/exhaust fans whenever the kitchen is occupied or in use
- Open windows and doors to increase fresh air flow when safety permits

Cleaning and disinfecting:

- See guidance at [CDC COVID-19 Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility](#)

Physical distancing:

- Set up tables, chairs and sleeping areas to ensure adequate physical distancing (6 feet apart).
- Always encourage physical distancing.

Section 2: For Guests with COVID-19 Symptoms Who Have Not Tested Yet

Step 1: Identify an Isolation Area in the Shelter

When no alternate housing sites are available, the shelter operators should isolate the untested symptomatic client(s) away from others as safely as possible within their shelter, **including away from guests who have tested positive for COVID-19.**

- Prioritize these guests for individual rooms (e.g. private rooms or an office).
- If individual rooms are not available, consider using a large well-ventilated room separate from the rest of the shelter.
- Keep mats/beds at least 6 feet apart
- Align mats/beds so clients sleep head-to-toe, if possible
- If possible, designate a separate bathroom for these guests
- Deliver meals to individuals staying in this room/area to reduce movement onsite
- Don't cohort positive COVID-19 guests with untested symptomatic guests who do not have a positive COVID-19 result.** If your site has both confirmed positive clients and symptomatic clients not yet tested, set up two separate areas: one for positive guests and one for untested symptomatic guests. Separate the areas as best as possible from each other and away from asymptomatic guests or guests that have tested negative for COVID-19.
- Initiate COVID-19 testing as quickly as possible. Public Health can support with onsite testing and resources.

Step 2: Designate Staff

When possible, designate staff to support the isolation room/area.

- Minimize the number of unvaccinated staff members and volunteers who have face-to-face interactions with guests who have tested positive for COVID-19.
- Limit the movement of those designated staff to decrease the risk of COVID-19 spreading to other parts of the facility
- Only staff providing essential care should enter the isolation room/area, and should maximize physical distancing while supporting guests (with non-contact food delivery, for example). Staff should maintain physical distance between all other staff, guests and volunteers as much as possible.
- Prioritize staff who are N95 fit tested for respirators to work in isolation area.

Step 3: Provide PPE & Encourage Testing

Regardless of vaccination status, **all staff and volunteers** should continue wearing well-fitted masks in homeless shelters, even if they are fully vaccinated.

Personal protective equipment:

Ensure ample Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) supply on site.

- Order PPE from vendors if supply is low
- Public Health can offer short-term PPE supplies for urgent, emergency scenarios. Call the King County COVID-19 Call Center (206-477-3977) for assistance.

For situations where staff would be in close contact (within 6 feet) of guests with suspected or confirmed COVID-19, staff should at a minimum wear:

- Eye protection (goggles or face shield),
- An N95 (ideally fit-tested), or KN95 respirator (or a surgical mask if a respirator is unavailable). Cloth masks should not be worn by staff who have close contact with COVID-19 positive clients.
- Disposable gown
- Disposable gloves
- Practice proper donning (putting on) and doffing (removing) of PPE to reduce self-contamination. Click [here for CDC guidance](#).

Testing:

Encourage staff to participate in COVID-19 testing as often as resources allow (consider at least weekly).

- If testing access is limited, prioritize routine testing for exposed staff.
- If staff develop symptoms at work, they should leave the site immediately isolate at home away from others and seek testing or medical evaluation if needed. If the staff lives at the site, then follow isolation guidance for guests. Staff who are COVID-19 positive or have symptoms should not report to work.

Step 4: Support Guests

Masks: Regardless of vaccination status, ensure **all guests** wear well-fitting masks while indoors, except if medically contraindicated, or while sleeping.

For anyone with suspect or confirmed COVID-19:

Monitor for worsening symptoms: Use standard facility procedures to determine whether a client needs immediate medical attention.

Call 911 if the guest has emergency warning signs of COVID-19:

- Trouble breathing
- Persistent pain or pressure in the chest
- New confusion or the inability to arouse
- Pale, gray or blue-colored skin, lips, or nail beds, depending on skin tone.

Call 911 for any other symptoms that are severe/concerning to you. Notify 911 dispatch and EMS that the client has or may have COVID-19.

Minimize the number of other people that symptomatic guests have contact with:

- Restrict visitors from entering the isolation room/area.
- Only staff providing essential care should enter the isolation room/area.
- Deliver meals to designated area to reduce client movement within the shelter.
- If the positive case needs to leave the building for any reason, designate a path through the building, prioritizing back doors, halls or stairwells. Consider escorting them through the shelter. Ensure the path limits contact with others.
- Consider designating 3 separate smoking areas; one for positive cases, one for symptomatic clients not yet tested and one for negative/asymptomatic clients.
- Only staff providing essential care should enter the isolation room/area, and should maximize physical distancing while supporting guests (with non-contact food delivery for example).

For all other guests:

Monitor for symptoms:

- Monitor all other guests for symptoms. If a guest develops symptoms, isolate them from others and test for COVID-19.
- Do not move the untested symptomatic guest into the isolation area with the COVID-19 positive guests without a positive result.** If you are unable to complete testing, identify a second area to isolate suspected/symptomatic guests away from others.

Encourage testing:

- Encourage guests to participate in COVID-19 testing as often as resources allow (consider at least weekly).
- If testing access is limited, prioritize testing symptomatic guests first, then exposed asymptomatic guests, then non-exposed asymptomatic guests.
- If a guest tests positive for COVID-19, they may move into the area of the shelter designated for people who have tested positive for COVID-19. See Section 1.**
- Reach out to Public Health for testing resources and support, using the [COVID-19 Intake Form](#)

Step 5: Facility Considerations

Ventilation:

Improve ventilation within the facility wherever possible. Public Health – Seattle & King County's HEART team can offer support with identifying ways to improve ventilation. The team can be reached at chs.heart@kingcounty.gov

See additional guidance at [Public Health- Seattle & King County Improving Indoor Air](#)

Consider:

- Setting up HEPA air purifiers as soon as possible if you have not already done so
- Allow restroom exhaust fans to operate non-stop and at full capacity
- Operate kitchen hood systems/exhaust fans whenever the kitchen is occupied or in use
- Open windows and doors to increase fresh air flow when safety permits

Cleaning and disinfecting:

- See guidance at [CDC COVID-19 Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility](#)

Physical distancing:

- Set up tables, chairs and sleeping areas to ensure adequate physical distancing (6 feet apart).
- Always encourage physical distancing.

Additional Resources:

Overall guidance:

- ❑ CDC: [Interim Guidance for Homeless Service Providers to Plan and Respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#)
- ❑ CDC: [COVID-19 Infection Control Inventory and Planning \(ICIP\) Tool for Homeless Service Providers \(cdc.gov\)](#)
- ❑ PHSKC: [Planning Tool For Severe Weather/Emergency Sheltering During COVID 19 \(updated Dec 2021\)](#)
- ❑ CDC: [Symptoms of COVID-19](#)

PPE:

- ❑ CDC: [Sequence for Donning and Removing Personal Protective Equipment \(PPE\)](#)

Cleaning and disinfecting:

- ❑ CDC: [Cleaning and Disinfecting your Facility: Every Day and When Someone is Sick](#)
- ❑ EPA Disinfectant list: [List N Tool: COVID-19 Disinfectants | US EPA](#)
- ❑ Public Health – Seattle & King County [Safer Cleaning, Sanitizing, and Disinfecting Best Practices During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)
- ❑ Public Health – Seattle & King County [Sanitation and Hygiene Guide for Homeless Service Providers](#)

Ventilation:

- ❑ PHSKC: [Public Health- Seattle & King County Improving Indoor Air](#)