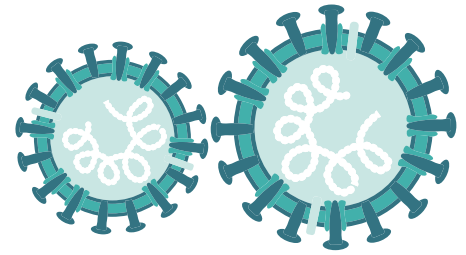


Responding to COVID-19 Among People Experiencing Unsheltered Homelessness



The risks associated with sleeping outdoors in an encampment setting are different than with staying indoors in an emergency shelter or other congregate living facility. Outdoor settings may allow people to increase distance between themselves and others. However, sleeping outdoors often does not provide protection from the environment, quick access to hygiene and sanitation facilities, or connection to healthcare. The balance of risks should be considered for each individual experiencing unsheltered homelessness.

Communication is Key

Community leaders should continue activities that protect people experiencing homelessness, including supporting continuity of homeless services, healthcare, behavioral health services, food pantries, and linkages to permanent housing.

Provide straightforward communications to people sleeping outside in the appropriate language. Identify people who are influential in the community who can help communicate with others. Post signs in strategic locations to provide information on hand hygiene, respiratory hygiene, and cough etiquette.

Request up-to-date contact information for each person.

Most important information to share:

- The most recent information about COVID-19 spread in their area
- Advice to avoid crowded areas if COVID-19 is circulating in their community
- Social distancing recommendations
- Hand hygiene instructions, cough etiquette instructions, and advice not to share personal items
- How to recognize the symptoms of COVID-19 and what to do if they are sick
- What to do if their friends, family, or community members are sick
- How to isolate themselves if they have symptoms
- Updated information on where to find food, water, hygiene facilities, regular healthcare, and behavioral health resources if there have been local closures or changes



Prevention Measures for Encampments

- Do not clear encampments during community spread of COVID-19. Clearing encampments can cause people to disperse throughout the community and break connections with service providers. This increases the potential for infectious disease spread.
- Encourage people staying in encampments to set up their tents/sleeping quarters with at least 12 feet x 12 feet of space per individual.
- Ensure nearby restroom facilities have functional water taps, are stocked with hand hygiene materials (soap, drying materials) and bath tissue, and remain open to people experiencing homelessness 24 hours per day.
- If toilets or handwashing facilities are not available nearby, provide access to portable latrines with handwashing facilities for encampments of more than 10 people.

Guidelines for Outreach Staff

Assign outreach staff who are at higher risk to severe illness to other duties. Advise outreach staff who will be continuing outreach activities on how to protect themselves and their clients from COVID-19 in the course of their normal duties. Instruct staff to:

- Greet clients from a distance of 6 feet and explain that you are taking additional precautions to protect yourself and the client from COVID-19.
- Screen clients for symptoms consistent with COVID-19 by asking them if they have a fever, new or worsening cough, or shortness of breath.
 - If the client has a cough, immediately provide them with a surgical mask to wear.
 - If urgent medical attention is necessary, use standard outreach protocols to facilitate access to healthcare.
- Continue conversations and provision of information while maintaining 6 feet of distance.
- Maintain good hand hygiene by washing your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or using hand sanitizer (with at least 60% alcohol) on a regular basis.
- Wear gloves if you need to handle client belongings. Wash your hands or use hand sanitizer (>60% alcohol) before and after wearing gloves.
- If at any point you do not feel that you are able to protect yourself or your client from the spread of COVID-19, discontinue the interaction and notify your supervisor. Examples include if the client declines to wear a mask or if you are unable to maintain a distance of 6 feet.
- Provide all clients with hygiene products, when available.
- Street medicine and healthcare worker outreach staff should review and follow recommendations for healthcare workers
- Review stress and coping resources for yourselves and your clients during this time.