

COVID-19

Los Angeles County Department of Public Health (DPH) Guidance for Homeless Shelters and Service Agencies

9/25/2023

Significant updates include:

- Information on the updated fall 2023 COVID-19 vaccine

COVID-19 continues to cause serious illness in Los Angeles County, especially in people experiencing homelessness. This guidance outlines strategies and specific actions you should take to help prevent and reduce the spread of COVID-19. Special considerations for nonresidential homeless service providers and Office of Diversion and Reentry (ODR) housing can be found at the end of this guidance.

Homeless shelters, homeless service agencies, and ODR housing must follow [Cal/OSHA's COVID-19 Prevention Non-Emergency Regulations](#) when not covered by the [Cal/OSHA Aerosol Transmissible Diseases \(ATD\) Standard](#).

Visit the [DPH COVID-19 webpage](#) for resources and the latest COVID-19 recommendations. If you have questions and would like to speak with someone, call the LA County Information Line at 2-1-1, which is available 24 hours a day. We appreciate your efforts to keep Los Angeles County healthy.

Screening and Signage

Screening

- Staff must screen new clients for [symptoms of COVID-19](#) upon intake, and if staying longer than overnight, once per day.
 - Shelters should accept clients with symptoms or who are positive for COVID-19 as long as they can isolate them from other residents.
- Staff and visitors entering the facility should self-screen for symptoms of COVID-19.
 - *When there is an outbreak at your facility*, facilities should actively screen staff for symptoms of COVID-19.
- When the LA County [CDC COVID-19 hospital admission levels](#) are Medium or High, screening testing (e.g. testing of all individuals regardless of symptoms) becomes recommended. For more information on strategies for screening testing see the [LA County COVID-19 Response Plan](#) and the [CDC Guidance on Management of COVID-19 in Homeless Service Sites and in Correctional and Detention Facilities](#).

Signage

- Post entry signs reminding staff and visitors to not enter the facility if they have symptoms of COVID-19 or are positive for COVID-19.
- Post [entry signs for clients](#) instructing them to inform staff before entering if they are sick or positive for COVID-19.
- Post signs recommending masks and the importance of hand hygiene. For examples of signage see [DPH's COVID-19 Guidance for Businesses and Employers](#).



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Vaccination

Everyone 6 months and older should get the [updated fall 2023 COVID-19 vaccine](#) to protect themselves and reduce the spread of the virus. Vaccination is the best way to protect against serious illness and death caused by COVID-19. The updated vaccine can increase prior protection (from previous vaccination or infection) that may have decreased over time. When possible, assist all clients and staff with staying up to date with their COVID-19 vaccines. Homeless service providers can request DPH on-site assistance with vaccinating their clients and staff by completing the LA County DPH Mobile Vaccine Team [interest form/formulario de interes](#). For information about the updated fall 2023 COVID-19 vaccine including authorized vaccines, vaccine safety, and where to get vaccinated, visit the [VaccinateLAcounty.com](#) webpage ([English](#) | [Spanish](#)).

Vaccination status should NOT be a barrier to accessing homeless services. Being vaccinated should not be required for housing.

COVID-19 Treatment

COVID-19 treatment can prevent people with COVID from getting very sick. All clients with COVID-19 or who are symptomatic close contacts should be evaluated for treatment for COVID-19 promptly. The oral medicines must be started within 5 days of when symptoms begin. Most adults and some children qualify for treatment if they have symptoms of COVID-19 AND either test positive for COVID-19 OR a doctor recommends treatment.

Medications for COVID-19 are free and can be prescribed by a healthcare provider or by contacting the health department at 1-833-540-0473. For more information, visit [ph.lacounty.gov/covidmedicines](#).

Ventilation and Physical Distancing

Ventilation:

Increasing ventilation is one of the most effective ways to reduce transmission of the COVID-19 virus through the air. Maximizing ventilation is particularly important in areas that are designated for isolating clients with COVID-19, see [CDPH Best Practices for Ventilation of Isolation Areas](#).

- Maximize air flow and filtration within the facility's HVAC system to improve air quality.
- Make sure your building's HVAC system is in good working order, and frequently inspected. HVAC systems can be optimized by installing a MERV 13 filter and ensuring a minimum of five air changes per hour (ACH).
- Create directional airflow from clean areas (i.e., the corridor) to less clean areas (i.e., sick client rooms) so that infectious particles do not spread within the facility and are, if possible, exhausted directly to the outdoors.
- When mechanical filtration cannot be improved enough to meet targets or in rooms with more crowding, portable air cleaners ("HEPA air filters") should be considered. Portable air cleaners must be appropriately sized for the area where they are deployed and need to be oriented so that air is exhausted upwards, without blowing air from one person to another.
- Improve natural ventilation (i.e., opening windows when weather permits) and properly use fans.
- Decrease indoor occupancy in areas where outdoor ventilation cannot be increased.

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For more information, refer to the following resources:

- CDPH [Interim Guidance for Ventilation, Filtration, and Air Quality in Indoor Environments; Best Practices for Ventilation of Isolation Areas](#)
- Cal/OSHA [COVID-19 Prevention Non-Emergency Regulation FAQs-Ventilation](#)
- CDC [Ventilation in Buildings; Ventilation in Homes](#)

Physical Distancing:

Beds should be positioned head-to-toe, with heads positioned as far apart as possible.

Masks and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

[Masks](#) help prevent the spread of COVID-19. For a mask to work well, it needs to have both a [good fit and good filtration](#). While all masks provide some level of protection, well-fitting respirators (such as N95, KN95, and KF94) provide the best protection. County indoor mask wearing rules and recommendations change based on local metrics. These metrics are updated regularly and published on the [LA County COVID-19 Response Plan website](#).

Note that during an outbreak, masking may be required for clients and staff.

Clients

- All clients must be provided a clean mask on request.
- Clients with symptoms of possible COVID-19 should wear a well-fitting surgical mask or respirator around others.
- Clients with COVID-19 must wear a well-fitting surgical mask or respirator if they must be around others through Day 10 per isolation instructions: ph.lacounty.gov/covidisolation.
- Clients who are close contacts should wear a well-fitting surgical mask or respirator indoors around others through Day 10 as per instructions for close contacts: ph.lacounty.gov/covidcontacts.

Staff

- Staff are not required to routinely mask indoors. When they are in clinical areas, it is strongly recommended to wear a mask when providing care or working in-person with clients. Masking recommendations may change depending on local metrics. See the [LA County COVID-19 Response Plan](#).
- Staff are required per [Cal/OSHA ATD Standard](#) to wear fit-tested N95 respirators when caring for confirmed or suspected COVID-19 cases. Please ensure you are complying with the regulations that apply to your facility, including the use of any other appropriate PPE for COVID-19 care (see [CDC Use of PPE](#) poster).
- Staff with COVID-19 infection who are permitted to return to work must wear a well-fitting mask at all times around others through at least Day 10. Surgical masks or respirators are strongly recommended.
- Staff who are close contacts should wear a well-fitting mask at all times while they are at work around others through Day 10. Surgical masks or respirators are strongly recommended.
- Facilities should consider sharing with staff the LA County DPH one-pager for workers [Know which Masks Provide the Best Protection](#) (available in multiple languages at ph.lacounty.gov/masks).

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When masks are not required, all individuals may choose to wear a mask without fear of discrimination or retaliation.

Additional masks resources see:

- CDPH [Get the Most Out of Masking](#)
- LA County [Mask Wearing Rules and Recommendations](#)

COVID-19 Cases and Close Contacts

Clients:

- With [symptoms](#) of possible COVID-19 should be masked, placed immediately in a separate space, and tested for COVID-19. If clients test negative continue to keep them away from others and retest as recommended by [CDPH](#).
- Who test positive for COVID-19 must isolate and follow all instructions for [isolation](#).
- Who are close contacts to a COVID-19 case should follow all instructions for [close contacts](#).

Staff:

- With symptoms of possible COVID-19 should be excluded from work pending COVID-19 test results. If symptoms persist, consider continuing self-isolation and retesting in 2 days as recommended by the [FDA](#) and [CDPH](#).
- Who test positive for COVID-19 must be excluded from the workplace until they meet all [return to work requirements](#).
- Who are close contacts may continue to work as long as they wear a well-fitted mask around others and remain asymptomatic. They should test for COVID-19 as soon as possible after exposure and then again at least 48 hours later (between days 3 to 5 after exposure).

Facilities should refer to [Responding to COVID-19 in the Workplace](#) for work exclusion and return to work criteria.

Please see [DPH's Guidelines for COVID-19 Cases and Close Contacts](#) for more information about instructions for close contacts and cases.

Isolation Onsite

- Regardless of outbreak status, facilities should accept and be prepared to isolate residents onsite who have, or are suspected of having, COVID-19. When a client has symptoms or tests positive for COVID-19, either at intake or during their stay, they need to be isolated from others within the shelter for the duration of their isolation period.
- Ideally, the client would be placed in a private room or cohorted in a room with other COVID-19 positive clients to avoid spread of the virus within the facility.
 - Provide a separate bathroom or ensure that a shared restroom can be effectively cleaned after they use it.

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- Clients should be given well-fitting surgical masks or respirators and instructed to wash their hands before moving to the isolation area, or when needing to use shared restrooms.
- If a designated space for isolation is not available, do your best to reduce transmission within the facility by optimizing ventilation in the infected client’s area and maximizing the physical distance between infected clients and others. See the Ventilation and Physical Distancing section above for more details.

For guidance on improving indoor air quality in isolation areas, including creating directional air flow to limit transmission, see [CDPH’s best practices](#).

If a client tests positive and cannot be isolated from others, and the Department of Mental Health (DMH) or Department of Health Services (DHS) is the funder, consult with these funders for placement options. For LAHSA-funded providers, consult other [LAHSA Interim Housing programs available in your area](#).

Note: Office of Diversion and Reentry (ODR) housing sites have designated isolation housing for their clients.

Special Considerations for Nonresidential Homeless Service Providers

- Offer shelter to confirmed cases or clients with symptoms living in encampments or other unsheltered settings. If this is not feasible, or if the client refuses, assist with onsite isolation (e.g., sheltering in place in an individual tent).
- Assess for communication means and social support among other “rough sleepers” (individuals who sleep on the streets, in tents, or in other places not meant for human habitation). Identify a capable “rough sleeper” who can periodically check on the case for worsening of symptoms, update outreach teams on the case’s condition, and provide food and water.
- Request up to date contact information for people living in encampments.
- Unless shelter or housing options are available, do not clear encampments, which can increase the spread of infection and break connections with service providers.

Case Reporting

Homeless service providers must report within 24 hours when they know of at least 3 or more linked COVID-19 cases among clients or staff within a 7-day period. It is strongly recommended to report a single COVID-19 case occurring among clients. Report cases to LA County DPH using the [Suspected COVID-19 Outbreak Reporting Form](#) or by calling 888-397-3993 or 213-240-7821. For more details, including the definition of linked cases and guidance for large settings, see the [Los Angeles County Health Officer Order COVID-19 Reporting Requirements](#).

On June 14, 2023, CDPH removed all COVID-19 reporting requirements for healthcare providers/clinical facilities conducting point-of-care tests (POCT) under a CLIA Certificate of Waiver. Single cases of COVID-19 identified at homeless shelters can be reported through the [Suspected COVID-19 Outbreak Reporting Form](#).

- See DPH’s [Provider and Laboratory Reporting Guidelines for COVID-19](#).

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Cleaning & Disinfecting Practices

- Regularly cleaning surfaces helps prevent the spread of germs that make people sick.
- Facilities should regularly clean frequently touched surfaces and objects such as door handles, stair rails, elevator buttons, touchpads, restroom fixtures. They should also clean other surfaces when they are visibly dirty.
- In addition to cleaning, the CDC recommends disinfecting areas where people have been obviously ill (for instance, vomiting on facility surfaces).

See [CDC When and How to Clean and Disinfect a Facility](#) for more detailed information.

Additional Resources

LA County Department of Public Health

- COVID-19 website: ph.lacounty.gov/Coronavirus and [sitemap](#)
- Guidelines for COVID-19 Cases (Isolation) and Close Contacts: [English](#) | [Spanish](#)
- [Homeless Services Resources](#)
- [COVID-19 Guidance for Businesses and Employers](#)
- [Los Angeles Health Alert Network](#): communications to health care professionals regarding time-sensitive topics such as local or national disease outbreaks and emerging health risks.

California Department of Public Health

- [Infection Control Guidance for Clients in Congregate Shelters, Including Shelters for People Experiencing Homelessness](#)
- [Guidance for Local Health Jurisdictions on Isolation and Quarantine of the General Public](#)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

- [Guidance on Management of COVID-19 in Homeless Service Sites and in Correctional and Detention Facilities](#)
- [COVID Prevention](#)