

COVID-19

Los Angeles County Department of Public Health Guidance for Homeless Service Agencies and Outreach Teams

Summary of Recent Changes:

01/24/2023:

- Removed work exclusion for close contact staff and quarantine for close contact clients
- Added resource information for therapeutics

The Los Angeles County Department of Public Health (DPH) is asking for your ongoing assistance to slow the spread of [COVID-19](#) in Los Angeles (LA) County. We need to continue to work together to slow the spread of this infection locally. The following recommendations are for homeless service agencies and outreach teams. They are designed to help you:

- Prevent and reduce the spread of COVID-19 among your staff and clients and
- Prevent and reduce the spread of COVID-19 between your staff and clients and others in the community.

COVID-19 continues to spread in the community with increased transmissibility of new COVID-19 variants. People experiencing homelessness (PEH) are particularly vulnerable to becoming infected due to crowded living conditions, limited access to hygiene facilities and supplies, and underlying health problems that may compromise immune function. If infected, PEH may be particularly vulnerable to serious illness because of the higher burden of conditions like chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), heart failure, and diabetes, and the accelerated aging and frailty that come with life on the street. For these reasons, DPH is following and reporting the number of cases of COVID-19 among PEH and working with other County agencies and community partners on prevention, screening, and reporting of COVID-19 cases among PEH and staff working with PEH.

Homeless Services Agencies must follow the [Cal/OSHA COVID-19 Prevention Emergency Temporary Standards](#) (ETS) and the [Cal/OSHA Aerosol Transmissible Diseases \(ATD\) standard](#) when applicable. In addition, they must follow the [LA County Health Officer Order](#) and are required to report cases, clusters, and outbreaks to the LA County Department of Public Health. Note that the directives in the LA County Health Officer Order must be followed when they are more stringent than the Cal/OSHA ETS. Agencies providing interim housing such as homeless shelters must follow the [CA Code of Regulations on Aerosol Transmissible Diseases](#).

We strongly encourage all homeless service agencies to review and update their emergency plans and consider ways to continue essential services if operations must be reduced temporarily. This document provides general information about COVID-19 and specific actions you should take to help slow the spread of COVID-19 and other respiratory infections.

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Create, review, or revise your infection control plan for your homeless services agency

- **Prevent and reduce transmission among employees**
 - ⊖ **Encourage employees to stay up to date with their COVID-19 vaccines including boosters:** COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective and are the best way to keep your workers safe and to reduce COVID-19 outbreaks in the workplace and in the community. COVID-19 vaccines are free and widely available in every community.
 - One updated (bivalent) booster is recommended for everyone 6 months and older when eligible. The updated COVID-19 booster has been updated to target both the original strain of the COVID-19 virus as well as the Omicron BA.4 and BA.5 subvariants. Remind employees they should get their updated booster at least 2 months after their last COVID-19 vaccine dose (either the final primary series dose or the last original [monovalent] booster). This is regardless of how many boosters or which type of vaccine they got in the past. For more information, visit ph.lacounty.gov/covidvaccineschedules.
 - Make it easier for your employees to get vaccinated and boosted. Consider offering a vaccination clinic at your workplace. Consider opportunities to support and incentivize your employees to get vaccinated or to make it easier to get vaccinated. This might include offering rewards such as paid time off or cash bonus payments, and/or policies that require employees to be up to date with recommended COVID-19 vaccines, or that offer more flexibility for employees who are up to date with COVID-19 vaccines.
 - To request a vaccination team or clinic at your workplace, please [complete this form](#), and one of the County's vaccination teams working in the sector for people experiencing homelessness will connect with you to provide vaccines to your staff and clients.
 - For more information about legal issues related to implementing vaccine requirements in your workplace, visit these sites from the [U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission](#) and the [California Department of Fair Employment and Housing](#).
 - **Follow face mask rules for employees:** See the [Los Angeles County Health Officer Order](#) and the [Cal/OSHA Emergency Temporary Standards](#) for more information about mask requirements. Please note that the directives in the LA County Health Officer Order must be followed when they are more stringent than the Cal/OSHA temporary standards.
 - **Actively encourage and support symptomatic or infected employees to stay home**
 - Make sure employees know that they may not come to work if sick. Inform workers about the availability of [Paid Sick Leave](#) and how to access this benefit.
 - Continue to educate employees about the [symptoms of COVID-19 and what to do if they are sick](#), including the importance of not coming to work and getting tested for COVID-19.
 - Inform all employees on [how they can obtain COVID-19 testing](#).

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- Exclude infected and exposed employees from the workplace unless they have satisfied all return-to-work requirements.
 - Make sure infected and exposed employees follow all [return-to-work requirements](#), including testing and masking. Note: exposed workers may continue to work as long as they remain asymptomatic and follow all requirements.
- Employers must develop and implement a process for screening employees for COVID-19 symptoms. Options include having employees evaluate their own symptoms before coming to work, using [signage](#) at the entrance of the workplace, or completing daily on-site entry screening to reinforce the message that employees who are sick or infected should not enter. See [Entry Screening](#).
- Manage COVID-19 exposures in the workplace when it is learned that an employee is infected by readily identifying and informing exposed contacts as soon as possible. Plan to offer testing to employees who may have been exposed to COVID-19 at work. See [Responding to COVID-19 in the Workplace](#).
- For additional resources to prevent COVID-19 in the workplace, see these [Best Practices](#).
- **Know the common symptoms of COVID-19**
 - People with COVID-19 can have a [wide range of symptoms](#) ranging from mild symptoms to severe illness. COVID-19 symptoms may include the following: fever, chills, cough, runny or stuffy nose, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, new loss of taste or smell, sore throat, nausea or vomiting, diarrhea, fatigue, muscle pain, and headache. This list does not include all possible symptoms. Symptoms may change with new COVID-19 variants and can vary depending on vaccination status.
 - Seek immediate medical attention by calling 911 for any emergency warning signs: trouble breathing, persistent chest pain or pressure, new confusion or inability to arouse, bluish lips or face.
- **Establish a communication plan**
 - Ensure that a plan is in place for alerting staff and volunteers of possible COVID-19 exposure or if they test positive for COVID-19, and for staff and volunteers to report symptoms or results of outside testing to agency managers.
 - Ensure that all agency staff and volunteers know how to report cases and symptomatic persons to the LA County Department of Public Health.
 - Identify and address potential language, cultural, and disability barriers associated with communicating COVID-19 information to workers and those you serve.
 - Post educational flyers throughout your office informing staff about COVID-19 and prevention practices, including information on COVID-19 vaccines.
 - Provide training to staff about the latest COVID-19 updates, transmission, and prevention practices.

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- **Create an alternate staffing plan**
 - Prepare for possible staffing shortages and plan for ways to continue essential services if on-site operations are reduced temporarily.
- **Work with the Department of Public Health and City/County agencies**
 - Create targeted responses for the diverse settings where your staff work with clients, including outreach teams on the street or at encampments, homeless shelters, and clinic/healthcare settings for PEH.
 - Work with the Department of Public Health to develop a plan for isolation areas as needs arise
- **Stay informed with reliable information about COVID-19**
 - [Los Angeles County Department of Public Health](#) (LAC DPH, County)
 - [California Department of Public Health](#) (CDPH, State)
 - [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC, National)

Personal protective equipment (PPE), hygiene kits, and cleaning supplies

- **Order and maintain supplies of PPE, hygiene kits, and cleaning materials**
 - Respirators (e.g., N95, KN95, or KF94) and medical masks, eye protection, disposable gloves, and gowns.
 - Personal-sized alcohol-based hand sanitizers, antibacterial soap, sanitizing wipes.
 - Plastic trash bags, single-use tissues, paper towels.
 - Consider additional supplies to support PEH tents, blankets, water bottles, snacks
- **Distribute PPE and train staff on use**
 - Distribute PPE and hygiene supplies to staff.
 - Employers are required by the [County Health Officer Order](#) to offer both well-fitting medical masks and respirators at no cost to their employees. In addition, per Cal-OSHA, upon request, employers must provide all employees who work indoors or in vehicles with more than one person with the correct-sized N95 respirator along with [basic instructions](#) on how to use the N95 respirator.
 - Train staff on when and how to use PPE, including well-fitting medical masks and respirators (e.g., N95, KN95, or KF94), eye protection, and gloves, handwashing practices, and social distancing techniques in the field. Educate staff about masks including respirators. While all masks provide some level of protection, well-fitting respirators, especially N95s, provide the best protection. Provide your employees with education and resources about masks. See LAC DPH mask webpage publichealth.lacounty.gov/masks (Spanish: ph.lacounty.gov/mascarillas) and the [Know which Masks Provide the Best Protection](#) summary sheet for workers. This information is available in multiple languages on the mask webpage.

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Encourage PEH to enter housing and provide infection control education to prevent transmission

Outreach teams are a vital source of resources and trauma-informed, trustworthy information. Outreach teams may provide education on the importance of testing, treatment, vaccination, masking, hygiene, and distancing. They are knowledgeable about what to do for those who may be sick and can help reduce fear and stigma among PEH.

• **Action Steps**

- Distribute reliable information from the Department of Public Health.
- Tailor messaging to PEH.
- Ensure that PEH with underlying health conditions are connected to a medical provider and know to speak with their provider if they have symptoms of COVID-19; make every effort to offer PEH with serious health conditions shelter or interim housing.
- Encourage regular hand hygiene and recognize inherent limitations for PEH. Distribute personal-sized hand sanitizers to PEH and direct PEH to hand-washing stations, if available.
- Remind clients to avoid rubbing eyes, nose, or mouth with unclean hands. Consider distributing cleaning supplies (like sanitizing wipes), tissues, and plastic bags for waste disposal to PEH living on the streets or in encampments.
- Counsel clients to avoid sharing food, drinks, utensils, cookware, cigarettes, pipes, blankets, and bedding with others.
- Counsel clients to keep their distance from people outside their household, family, or tent-dwelling unit, especially those with cold or flu symptoms.
- If the client sleeps in a tent with others, advise sleeping head to toe.
- Encourage clients to stay up to date with COVID-19 vaccines, and other recommended vaccines, including influenza and pneumonia.
- Counsel clients to come into shelters, shower stations, and/or bathroom stations to improve hygiene conditions.
- Address clients' unique mental health stressors and reinforce positive coping skills, including reaching out to their mental health providers, looking to social contacts for support, etc.
- Distribute rapid COVID-19 antigen test kits to unsheltered individuals and help with instructions on how to use.

Provide education and screen PEH for COVID-19 symptoms

While most outreach team members are not healthcare providers or clinicians (and should not step into this role), they can perform some lay-friendly, basic education, and health systems navigation. When in doubt, contact a healthcare provider. For emergencies, call 911.

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Action Steps

- Educate PEH about when and where to seek medical attention.
- Educate PEH about the symptoms of COVID-19.
- Ask PEH if they would like to stay in a shelter for access to running water and a bathroom.
- Encourage clients to enroll in health coverage and get connected with a medical home, but also encourage them to seek medical attention early if they get sick.
- Encourage clients to call their medical provider or 211 if they have COVID-19 symptoms.
- Educate clients that they can get free COVID-19 treatment if they test positive for COVID-19 and have even mild symptoms. Treatment can prevent them from getting very sick but the oral medicines must be started within 5 days of when their symptoms begin. They can contact their own provider or they can call the free DPH telemedicine service at 1-833-540-0473 open 7 days a week, 8:00 am-8:30 pm. See ph.lacounty.gov/covidmedicines for resources available in multiple languages.
- Remind clients and their social contacts to call 911 if they experience severe symptoms.
- Offer rapid antigen test kits and educate on use.

Outreach teams may assist with simple screening/triage of PEH for COVID-19 symptoms and provide [resources on COVID-19 treatment](#) if they encounter PEH with symptoms in the field.

• Action Steps

- Screen PEH for [COVID-19 symptoms](#).
- Outreach teams should give a [highly protective mask](#) (e.g., a well-fitting medical mask or respirator) to clients that have concerning symptoms of possible COVID-19. Outreach workers should also wear a highly protective mask, eye protection, and gloves when assessing symptomatic clients.
- Consider carrying a disposable thermometer to check clients' temperatures (fever is 100.4 F or higher). Subjective or reported but unmeasured fever is also considered a fever, including reports of feeling feverish, having shaking chills, or night sweats.
 - If the client has severe symptoms (high fevers, difficulty breathing, worsening shortness of breath, difficulty walking or standing upright, inability to keep water or food down, inability to care for self, (looks sick!)), call 911 immediately and notify dispatcher about client's symptoms.
 - If the client has a fever and either cough or shortness of breath, advise the client to call their medical provider. If they don't have a provider, help them find a provider through 211.

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- If the client does not have a phone, consider offering your team cell phone to assist with making this call over speakerphone. Sanitize the phone with alcohol wipes after use. Use gloves and dispose of them properly in a sealed plastic bag.
- Symptomatic clients with high-risk medical conditions (age greater than 65, COPD/asthma, heart failure, chronic lung or kidney disease, immune-compromising conditions like HIV/AIDS, cancer, diabetes, and pregnancy) should be strongly advised to get tested and if positive, to seek free COVID-19 treatment right away to lower their risk of getting very sick and to come into [medical shelters](#) or isolation areas at homeless shelters for rest/recuperation and more frequent monitoring. If you have COVID-19 cases or symptomatic clients who cannot be isolated onsite during their illness, and have medical comorbidities, call DPH's referral line at 833-596-1009 (8AM to 8PM daily). See ph.lacounty.gov/covidmedicines for more information.
- PEH who are not at high risk should be encouraged to come into shelters with designated isolation areas for rest and recuperation.
 - Connect them with free COVID-19 treatment resources and the DPH telemedicine service as described above and detailed here: ph.lacounty.gov/covidmedicines.
 - Counsel symptomatic clients to wear a face mask when around others and dispose of their tissues/waste in a trash bin.
 - Ask your clients about their social support. Encourage friends and social contacts to check-in on clients several times a day and bring water/food.
 - Advise client and social contacts to call 911 immediately if the client develops severe or worsening symptoms.

Reporting confirmed cases of COVID-19 or clients with COVID-19 symptoms to the LA County Department of Public Health

When Should Cases or Symptomatic Persons Be Reported?

- Sites must report to the Department of Public Health under two circumstances:
 - A single confirmed case of COVID-19 in either client or staff
OR
 - Two or more individuals, clients or staff, who show symptoms of acute respiratory illness occurring within 14 days of each other, whether or not COVID-19 has been confirmed.
- Reports should be made online via Los Angeles County Department of Public Health [COVID-19 Cases and Suspected Outbreak Reporting Form for Facilities](#). If you experience technical difficulties with this website, please call the DPH Disease Reporting line at 888-397-3993, 8AM to 5PM, or (213) 974-1234 (After Hours Emergency Operator).

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- If you would like consultation on dealing with a symptomatic but unconfirmed case, you may contact the DPH Provider Call Line at 213-240-7941 for assistance, Monday through Friday, 8AM to 5PM (for time-sensitive questions after hours, call 213-974-1234 and ask for the on-call clinician).

Reporting of Point of Care Test (POCT) Results: Rapid Antigen Tests

- Homeless service providers who are assisting and/or supervising clients and staff performing rapid antigen tests are requested to report positive COVID-19 test results through the [COVID-19 People Experiencing Homelessness \(PEH\) Point of Care Test \(POCT\) Result Report Form](#). Reporting positive antigen tests via this online POCT form replaces the requirement for submitting information through the [COVID-19 Cases and Suspected Outbreak Reporting Form for Facilities](#).
- If your facility is not listed on the dropdown menu, please complete a one-time registration by emailing ncovid-peh@ph.lacounty.gov. This is required so your facility information can be pre-populated in the POCT reporting portal.
- For questions regarding POCT reporting email ncovid-peh@ph.lacounty.gov.

What should you do after a confirmed case of COVID is found in an encampment?

- Once in the encampment, be especially aware of people experiencing cough or shortness of breath or appearing feverish or ill. If you identify any person with severe symptoms, call 911.
- When within 6 feet of a positive client you should put on a well-fitting respirator (e.g., N95), eye protection, and gloves. Give the positive client a medical mask or respirator to wear over their nose and mouth, if possible.
- Unnecessary transportation for any reason should be avoided by the team. Careful assessment of the risk of remaining outside must be weighed with the risk of relocating to a shelter/congregate setting.
- If no indoor isolation options are available, shelter in place with an individual tent. In this case, ensure that the street medicine/outreach team visit frequently to monitor the case for deterioration and the close contacts for development of symptoms.
- Identify a capable rough sleeper in the camp to report the ill person's condition back to the street medicine/outreach team, especially if phone calls/texting is an option.
- Unless housing options are available, do not clear encampments. Clearing encampments can cause people to disperse throughout the community and break connections with service providers. This increases the potential for the spread of infection.
- Request up-to-date contact information for each person living in the encampment area.
- Encourage people staying in encampments to test immediately if they have symptoms. If you need rapid tests, please submit requests to DPH via the online [form](#).

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- Encourage clients to get vaccinated against COVID-19 including boosters by offering vaccine clinics onsite. To request a vaccination team, please [complete this form](#).
- Provide straightforward communications to the encampment in the appropriate language. Post signs in strategic locations to provide information on hand hygiene, respiratory hygiene, and cough etiquette. Additional information should include:
 - The most recent information about COVID-19 spread in their area.
 - Advice to avoid crowded areas if COVID-19 is circulating in their community.
 - 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 or test positive.
 - That there is free COVID-19 treatment to help keep them from getting very sick once they have COVID-19. They should ask for this medicine if they test positive as soon as they have any symptoms (see resources in multiple languages at ph.lacounty.gov/covidmedicines)
 - Updated information on where to find food, water, hygiene facilities, regular healthcare, and behavioral health resources if there have been local closures or changes.
 - Information on getting [vaccinated](#) against COVID-19 and [accessing treatment](#). Public Health Telehealth Services can be reached at 1-833-540-0473 for free evaluation and COVID-19 medical treatment.
- Camp members should be given well-fitting medical masks and respirators (e.g., N95) and hygiene resources and encouraged to practice as much distancing from other persons and groups as possible.
- Camp members also should be instructed on how to care for the ill person, such as setting food outside his or her tent without coming into proximity with the person.
- Ensure nearby restroom facilities have functional water taps, are stocked with hand hygiene materials (soap, drying materials) and bath tissue, and remain open 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.
- Ensure that the street medicine/outreach teams/mobile services are expanded so that very vulnerable and hard to reach people can receive public health messages and needed services.

Patient Refusal

- If a person refuses to go to a site where the diagnosis can be confirmed, every effort should be made to assist the camp to find an onsite “isolation” option.
- One option may be an additional tent or an isolated area where friends can still provide food and water and care for the patient.

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- Camp members should be given well-fitting medical masks and respirators (e.g., N95) and adequate hygiene supplies. They should also be encouraged to stay up to date with vaccinations and test immediately when symptomatic.
- Regular camp monitoring routines should be set up for such areas with staff who wear adequate personal protective equipment.

Guidance for Clinical Staff

- Prioritize medical visits for clients with symptoms who have high-risk medical conditions (age greater than 65, COPD/asthma, heart failure, chronic lung or kidney disease, immune-compromising conditions like HIV/AIDS, cancer, diabetes, and pregnancy) OR if they have been exposed to COVID-19.
- Assess for clinical stability, medical conditions that increase the risk for COVID-19 complications, risk of exposure to COVID-19, and social conditions including:
 - Living conditions (living in tent, make-shift shelter, shelter setting)
 - Ability to care for basic needs while sick (resting, hydrating, eating, toileting)
 - Social supports (friends or social contacts who can check on the client while sick, bring water/food, or call 911 if worsening)
 - Communication means (access to a phone, history of demonstrated follow-up in medical care)
 - Life negotiation skills (insight into medical diagnosis and ability to communicate needs if symptoms worsen)
- Provide recommendations about the person's disposition to a hospital, isolation room, or stay at the encampment only after completing a comprehensive clinical and social assessment.
- COVID-19 outbreaks at encampments will be investigated by DPH. Work with DPH to identify any symptomatic clients or confirmed cases and prevent further transmission.
- Symptomatic people who have high-risk medical conditions should be advised to stay in an isolation room if one is available for frequent monitoring while sick.
- Consider reaching out to mental health colleagues or the Department of Mental Health hotline at 800-854-7771 if the person has limited insight into the medical diagnosis and needs further evaluation of current mental condition (including 5150 hold).

Other Helpful Resources:

- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Mental health and coping with stress**
<https://www.cdc.gov/mentalhealth/stress-coping/cope-with-stress/index.html>
- **People at risk for serious illness from COVID-19**
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-with-medical-conditions.html>

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- **U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness: Federal Guidance and Resources**
<https://www.usich.gov/covid-19/>
- **Los Angeles County Department of Public Health’s Guidance for Homeless Shelters**
<http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov/media/Coronavirus/docs/homelessness/GuidanceHomelessShelters.pdf>
- **Los Angeles County Department of Public Health Best Practices to Prevent COVID-19 Guidance for Businesses and Employers**
<http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/acd/ncorona2019/BestPractices/>
- **Los Angeles County Department of Public Health’s Healthcare Provider Hub**
<http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/acd/ncorona2019/>
- **HUD Exchange Resources**
<https://www.hudexchange.info/news/covid-19-prevention-and-response-for-homeless-providers-daily-resource-digest/>
- **Seattle-King County Public Health Sanitation and Hygiene Checklist**
<https://assets.documentcloud.org/documents/6796309/Sanitation-Hygiene-Assessment-Tool.pdf>

