



## **Pandemic Preparedness Planning for Homeless Shelters/Communal Living Facilities**

---

As you are aware, there is currently a global outbreak of COVID-19 that may soon affect our community. Important community services may be curtailed, consolidated or suspended because of widespread absenteeism in the workplace. This will impact all of Allen County, but may have a greater impact on the homeless population. Homeless people may be at greater risk of becoming sick in a pandemic because:

- Homeless people typically live in more crowded conditions.
- Homeless people often suffer from a variety of chronic and acute conditions, which may affect their immune system response.
- They also often suffer from addiction and mental illness in rates disparate from the general population and may have difficulty following advice.
- They may not seek care and isolation until they are very sick.

### **Impact on Daily Living in the Event of a Pandemic**

Things to consider while developing an emergency plan:

- Businesses may reduce hours or close for a prolonged period of time. Working homeless people may not have sick leave and vacation benefits; the financial impact on the working homeless and working poor could be very high.
- Medical facilities and emergency services such as fire, ambulance and police may also be overwhelmed by demand and therefore slow to respond.
- Public transportation may be limited or unavailable. People relying on public transportation may be greatly affected.
- Community activities may be curtailed or cancelled to prevent the spread of infection. People relying on foodbanks, feeding programs, churches and libraries may have to make adjustments to their routines.
- Restaurants, libraries and coffee shops may close. Many homeless use businesses during the day when shelters are closed.
- Homeless people who do not generally access your services may be forced by sickness and lack of supplies to seek help at your agencies. This increased demand will impact your regular users and staff.
- Homeless people may have limited access to information from the mainstream media (or may not trust or understand what they hear) and may rely on trusted agency staff and case managers for information.

### **Steps for Developing a Pandemic Plan in Your Facility**

- ✓ **Develop and review infectious disease protocols, policies and procedures. For example:**
  - Develop a tool to screen all individuals and staff for symptoms on admission to the facility and a plan for managing individuals and staff with symptoms, including immediate isolation.

- Assure maximal spacing of clients (decrease social density).
  - Assure clients use good cough etiquette. Provide tissues and surgical masks.
  - Strongly encourage all people to sanitize hands upon entering the building. Consider using one primary entrance to minimize the number of staff needed to oversee this practice.
  - Educate clients and staff on hand hygiene, cough etiquette, other infection control and use of personal protective equipment (PPE).
- ✓ **Stockpile supplies:** Consider stockpiling supplies now that will enable care on site for ill individuals. If resources are limited, make it a priority to have plenty of hand sanitizer, tissues and masks on hand. Below is a list of common supplies that may be needed during a pandemic:
- Soap, paper towels, hand sanitizer, hand wipes and tissues
  - Cleaning supplies, large/small garbage bags, and other waste disposal supplies
  - Personal protective equipment, including gloves, surgical masks and goggles
  - Thermometers and thermometer covers (approximately one thermometer for every 10 ill people should be adequate)
  - Fever-reducing medications
  - Extra linen, towels, blankets, bedclothes
  - Extra fluids/foods: juice, Gatorade, Pedialyte, instant soup, Jell-O, tea, etc.
- ✓ **Food practices and access:** Living settings should reinforce routine food safety and sanitation practices.
- Reinforce regular hand washing by staff, volunteers and clients preparing food.
  - Discourage the sharing of dishes, cutlery and other items.
  - Use disposable cutlery and pre-packaged food if staffing levels are low.
  - Stockpile a six to eight week supply of non-perishable food in case deliveries of food are disrupted if possible.
- ✓ **Plan for staff absences:** Develop flexible pandemic attendance and sick-leave policies for staff. Staff may need to stay home when caring for a sick household member or caring for children in the event of school dismissals. Identify critical job functions and positions and plan for alternative coverage by cross-training staff. Also consider planning for staff to stay on-site if needed.

### **General Tips for Isolation within a Homeless Shelter or Communal Living Facility**

- Separate individuals by more than three to six feet when possible.
- Designate dedicated staff members to be caregivers to anyone in isolation.
- Wear a surgical mask when providing direct care within three feet.
- Have hand sanitizer, tissues and waste baskets or bags at each bedside of the sick
- Place sick clients closer to the restroom.
- Arrange beds so individuals lie head to toe relative to each other.
- Create temporary physical barriers between beds in larger rooms using sheets or curtains to reduce droplet spread.
- Direct ill individuals to hospitals or alternative care sites if necessary.