

# Interim COVID-19 Guidance for Homeless Shelters

## Introduction

Homeless shelters pose many challenges due to their unique environment. Particular challenges include vulnerable populations, restrictions on client or resident movement and limited skilled staff or alternative work schedules for staff. Special considerations should be taken to prevent disease transmission when considering the movement of clients or residents, visitors and staff into and within the facilities. Facilities are advised to contact and collaborate with the local health department along with other local, state, and federal partners to develop specific protocols and procedures that would be employed to control impacts from COVID-19.

**NOTE:** Please be aware that this guidance is based on the best information currently available. Visit the [Oregon Health Authority, Housing and Urban Development](#), and [Center for Disease Control and Prevention](#) for more information.

## Facility Readiness and Response plans

Persons experiencing homelessness may be at risk for infection during an outbreak of COVID-19. This interim guidance is intended to support response planning by homeless service providers, including overnight emergency shelters, day shelters, and meal service providers. There is much to learn about the transmissibility, severity, and other features of the disease. Everyone can do their part to help plan, prepare, and respond to this emerging public health threat.

### Be prepared

- Refer to the CDC site for pandemic preparedness [resources for Homeless shelters](#).
- Identify and implement mechanisms for access to public health and other critical information needed for situational awareness.
- Participate in local interagency COVID-19 planning activities.

### Communicate with staff and residents

- Keep residents and employees informed.
- Describe what actions the facility is taking to protect them, including answering their questions and explaining what they can do to protect themselves and their fellow residents.
- Educational materials and information should be provided to residents and visitors. If possible, materials should be translated.

**Protect your volunteers and workforce and your residents**

- Ensure staff are aware of sick leave policies and are encouraged to stay home if they are ill with respiratory symptoms.
- Advise employees to check for any signs of illness before reporting to work each day and notify their supervisor if they become ill.

**Social Distancing in Congregate Settings**

Limiting the number of people who congregate and interact with one another within a facility and allowing more physical space between people can help to curb spread of this infection. Depending on specific facility needs and severity of exposure to persons with COVID-19, social distancing can range from decreasing the number of people who can congregate at a time for different activities to suspending all non-essential activities. Explain to clients and staff why people are isolated from others to avoid stigmatizing those who are affected.

**The following are examples of social distancing that can be considered in congregate settings to limit the spread:**

Sleeping Arrangements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Increase spacing so beds are at least 3-6 feet apart</li><li>• If space allows, put less residents within a dorm/unit</li><li>• Arrange beds so that individuals lay head-to-toe (or toe-to-toe), or use neutral barriers</li><li>• Move residents with symptoms into separate rooms with closed doors</li><li>• If only shared rooms are available, consider housing the ill person in a room with the fewest possible number of other residents</li><li>• Avoid housing people with underlying conditions in same room as people with symptoms</li></ul>
Mealtimes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Stagger mealtimes to reduce crowding in shared eating facilities</li><li>• Stagger the schedule for use of common/shared kitchen</li></ul>
Bathrooms & Bathing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Create a staggered bathing schedule to reduce the amount of people using the facilities at the same time</li></ul>
Common Areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Create a schedule for using common spaces</li><li>• Reduce activities that congregate many residents at once such as “house meetings” and opt for smaller group activities</li></ul>

Transport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Opt for transporting less people per trip and ensure that passengers have more space between one another</li></ul>
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Reduce the amount of face-to-face interactions with residents for simple informational purposes</li><li>• Consider using the following methods of communication: Bulletin boards, signs, posters, brochures, emails, phone, sliding information under someone's door or mailbox</li></ul>