

Information on COVID-19: Organizations Housing Older Adults in the Community

What is COVID-19?

Coronavirus is a new respiratory illness. Currently, it is thought to spread person-to-person through respiratory droplets when an infected person coughs or sneezes, or between people who are in close contact with each other (within about 6 feet). Symptoms include fever, cough, and shortness of breath.

Older Adults Are at Higher Risk

Adults aged 60 and over are among those at highest risk for serious COVID-19 illness. As people age, their immune systems change, making it harder for their body to fight off diseases and infection. Many older adults are also more likely to have one or more health conditions that make it harder to cope with and recover from illness, including diabetes, heart disease, lung disease, and weakened immune systems.

What Housing Organizations Can Do

How can staff at senior housing facilities prepare for the COVID-19 outbreak?

- Isolate anyone sick or showing COVID-19-like symptoms
- Take inventory of cleaning supplies and personal protective equipment like gloves and masks; call your supply chain retailer to check for shortages
- Remind older adults to have non-perishable food, supplies and medications on hand, and see if they need assistance obtaining those
- Think about how staff roles could be shifted from non-essential activities (such as routine maintenance) to assist more with cleaning, checking on residents, or helping isolated residents
- Develop an emergency plan, including:
 - o Suspending visitor access
 - Consider whether it's possible to use a single point of exit/entry
 - Determine how you will screen visitors for illness (e.g., ask whether or not visitors have fever, cough or shortness of breath), **Ill people should not enter the housing facility.**
 - Consider how to arrange for residents to communicate with family (via phone or videoconference)
 - Also consider exceptions for end-of-life family visits (e.g. limit access to other people/areas in the facility)

What can senior housing facilities do day-to-day during the COVID-19 outbreak?

- **Do not allow anyone who is sick to attend, visit, or come to work**
- Post signs at the entrance instructing visitors not to visit if they have symptoms of coronavirus
- Encourage attendees to maintain good habits, such as frequent hand washing and covering their coughs
- Screen staff for temperature, cough and respiratory symptoms daily
- Monitor residents and staff for fever and respiratory symptoms

- Try to find ways to give people more physical space so that they aren't in close contact as much as possible
- Clean and disinfect surfaces and frequently touched areas and objects (like doorknobs) often
- Make tissues and hand sanitizer widely available, as well as plenty of soap and paper towels for handwashing. If face masks are available, distribute to sick residents (note: there is currently a global shortage of face masks.)
- Make sure you have a garbage can for used tissues, paper towels, and other items.
- Wear masks and wash hands thoroughly before entering and after exiting a resident's room
- Implement the following, to the extent possible:
 - o Cancel gatherings and programs
 - o Limit non-essential visitors
 - o Cancel transportation that carries groups of people
 - o Conduct activities over the phone or computer
 - o Switch congregate meals to "to-go" meals, or meal delivery
 - o Identify how to help homebound seniors with food, medications, and other supplies
 - o Call at-risk older adults daily and make sure they're okay
- If you suspect someone has COVID-19, place them in a private room away from others and ask them to wear a face mask if available. Immediately call their doctor.

Steps for Serving Congregate Meals

- Congregate meals should be canceled if at all possible
- Staff should not be working if they are sick
- Residents should not come to a congregate meal if they are sick
- Consider bagging meals for delivery or for pick-up at staggered times.
- If you have to have a congregate meal, all staff and clients should follow good, basic health practices, including handwashing before serving or eating.
- As much as possible, put physical space between clients so that there is less close contact between people. This might mean asking clients to stand further apart while waiting to receive food and sitting further apart from one another while eating. Keeping six feet apart is ideal, but encourage clients to stay at least an arm's length away from each other whenever possible.
- Clean surfaces frequently, including tables, chairs, and doorknobs. Standard cleaning products are effective against COVID-19.

Guidance for Staff and Visitors Entering the Older Adults' Units

Staff and visitors who are sick, or who have had close contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19, should not enter the building or residential unit. All visitors should limit their movement within the building.

Staff and visitors who are not sick, and need to enter a resident's room, should:

- Wear masks and gloves, if available, and wash hands thoroughly before entering a resident's room.
- If masks or gloves are not available, visitors should follow basic hygiene principles including:
 - o Washing hands or using hand sanitizer often
 - o Covering coughs
 - o Keeping 6 feet of distance from residents

- Clean all “high-touch” surfaces daily, or more often if possible

These steps help to protect the health of both the visitors and the residents.

What to Do if There is a Suspected or Confirmed Case

Please continually communicate the seriousness of the COVID-19 outbreak to residents – particularly the steps they can take to reduce their risk. The identity of a suspected or confirmed case is protected health information and may not be disclosed. Alerting residents about possible cases is not necessary – residents and staff should be following the guidelines above regardless.

If there is a confirmed case in your building, the person who is sick will be isolated in their unit and will be following the guidance above (What to Do if You Get Sick).

If the identity of the case is known, visitors and staff should not enter the unit, but can leave food and other items for the resident outside their door. Staff should check on the person with a daily phone call if possible.

If staff or visitors have been in close contact with a confirmed case while they were sick, they should self-quarantine for 14 days and self-monitor their symptoms.

- Close contact is being within approximately 6 feet of an ill person for a prolonged period. This could include visiting or caring for them, sitting within 6 feet of a sick person in a healthcare waiting area or room, or being exposed to a sick person’s cough, or touching their used tissues with a bare hand.

If staff or visitors to a building with a confirmed case of COVID-19 haven’t had close contact with someone while they were ill, they do not need to self-quarantine at this time. They do need to:

- Practice good hygiene
- Monitor their symptoms
- If you develop symptoms, isolate yourself at home immediately and call your healthcare provider.

If you are in King County and believe you were exposed to a confirmed case of COVID-19, stay home for 14 days and monitor yourself for symptoms. If you have questions, contact our novel coronavirus call center: 206-477-3977. The call center is 8 am to 8 pm, 7 days per week.

For general concerns and questions about COVID-19, please call the Washington State Novel Coronavirus Call Center at 800-525-0127.

Guidance for Maintenance Work around the Building

To the extent that maintenance can be postponed, that will help reduce the likelihood of transmitting the virus.

Maintenance workers going into units should follow the guidance for staff and visitors entering older adults’ units. Maintenance crew working in communal areas, like in kitchens or on roofs, should also follow the guidance for visitors entering older adults’ units to the extent possible. In sum:

- Do not come to work if sick
- Wear gloves and masks if possible

- Wash hands or use hand sanitizer frequently
- Cover coughs
- Keep 6 ft. of distance from other people
- Clean all “high-touch” surfaces daily, or more often if possible

What Older Adults Can Do

What to Do if You Get Sick

- Don't go to the emergency department unless it is a critical medical emergency.
- Call your doctor!
- Stay home except to get medical care (call ahead before visiting your doctor)
- Separate yourself from other people and animals in your home
- Use a tissue or your elbow to cover your coughs and sneezes
- Clean your hands often
- Avoid sharing personal household items
- Clean all surfaces that people frequently touch every day
- Monitor your symptoms and let your doctor know if you get worse.

What steps can older adults take to reduce their risk?

- Stay home and avoid large gatherings as much as possible
- Wash your hands with soap and water or use hand sanitizer (60% alcohol) frequently
- Don't touch your face
- Avoid people who are sick
- Don't share personal household items, like eating utensils
- Clean surfaces frequently touched areas and objects (like doorknobs)
- Avoid cruise travel and non-essential air travel
- Try to keep 6 feet of distance from other people
- Avoid close contact with others (e.g., don't shake hands)

How can older adults be prepared?

- If you're over 60 and you have underlying conditions, come up with a plan with your doctor to identify your health risks for coronavirus and how to manage symptoms. Contact your doctor right away if you do have symptoms.
- Have supplies on hand, such as:
 - o Medications
 - o Hand soap
 - o Household items, including cleaning supplies
 - o Groceries, especially non-perishable
- Identify a person or social group who can help you, including bringing meals if necessary, and ask them to check on you by phone to make sure you are okay

This guidance is current as of March 11, 2020. For the latest information and guidance on coronavirus, please see:

Public Health – Seattle & King County’s website: www.kingcounty.gov/covid

Washington State Department of Health’s website:

For general information: <https://www.doh.wa.gov/Emergencies/Coronavirus>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>