

**Guidelines for Preventing & Control of COVID-19 in Program Approved Service Agencies (PASAs) :** *Conventional Strategies in the Absence of Community Widespread Transmission*

This document includes steps that you can take to prevent Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) from entering and spreading in your agencies, homes and day programs. This guidance does not include outbreak response. All recommendations in this document are based on guidelines provided by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC).

**Background**: COVID-19 is the abbreviated name for novel Coronavirus Disease 2019 that first emerged in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China. Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a respiratory illness that can spread from person to person through respiratory droplets.

The situation with this outbreak is evolving rapidly with new information being learned daily. The CDC is working closely with federal, state, and local health departments, Visit the CDC website for the latest updates:

[https:Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)//www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html)

**How it Spreads:** The coronavirus is thought to spread mainly from person to person, between people who are in close contact with each other (defined as within about six feet), and through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs.

It may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads. Learn more about how COVID-19 spreads at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/transmission.html>.

**Symptoms:** The main symptoms are fever, coughing, and shortness of breath, just like the flu. Currently, CDC believes that symptoms may appear in as few as two days or as long as 14 days after exposure. There is no reliable way to distinguish COVID-19 symptoms from symptoms caused by the common flu, as both diseases can cause fever, coughs, and pneumonia in severe cases. Agencies should take care to not over-attribute symptoms shared with the flu to COVID-19.The highest risk occurs when you are in close contact with someone. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/symptoms.html>

**Treatment:** Currently, there are no vaccines or antiviral medications to prevent or cure COVID-19, however scientists are currently working on both. Comfort measures should be provided to help relieve symptoms.

**Steps to Prevent COVID-19 Include:**

1. [**Handwashing**](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/images/prevention-handwashing.png): Reinforce in your clients, staff, visitors best practices for handwashing:

Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.

If soap and water are not readily available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.

1. Always wash your hands with soap and water if your hands are visibly dirty. **Follow cough, sneeze and distance etiquette:** Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth. This makes it more difficult for the virus to get from a surface to yourself. Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue, then dispose of it immediately in a trash can, preferably one with a touchless lid opener.
2. **Cleaning**: Frequently clean commonly touched surfaces and objects daily, like tables, countertops, light switches, doorknobs, elevator buttons, phones, handrails, cabinet handles and other frequently touched surfaces using cleaning products according to the manufacturer’s instructions. Clients in their own apartments or homes can use the same cleaners or wipes in their residences as they usually do. [The EPA has posted a list of antimicrobial products](https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2020-03/documents/sars-cov-2-list_03-03-2020.pdf) registered for use against the virus.

Remind your staff to be extra vigilant when cleaning, performing housekeeping and preparing food.

1. **Add more cleaning stations**. Station hand wipes or alcohol-based hand sanitizer with 60-95% alcohol in common assembly areas, such as living areas, day program areas, and lobbies. At your main entrance, provide a cleaning station with alcohol-based hand sanitizer, tissues, and a trash can for visitors. Step up your infection control. These preventive measures may help avert an outbreak of COVID-19 as well as other illnesses.
2. **In day program facilities, use signage to notify visitors and vendors:** Post signs at the entrance instructing visitors not to visit if they have symptoms of a cough/respiratory infection or fever. Here is an example of signage that you can adapt for your day program: <https://paltc.org/sites/default/files/Attention%20Visitors%20All%20facilities.pdf>
3. **Monitor your clients for illness and consider** active monitoring of residents and restriction of group field trips and group activities.
4. **Monitor your staff for illness.** Healthcare workers can inadvertently spread viruses like this. Make sure your staff know to not come in to work if they are not feeling well. The following symptoms may appear 2-14 days after exposure: fever, cough, shortness of breath.
5. **Learn more about** [People at Risk for Serious Illness from COVID-19](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/high-risk-complications.html)

**Communicate and Stay Informed:** Communicating with your clients, families, staff and visitors is critical. The more you communicate, the less likely they are to be stressed and speculate. Still, clients, families, and staff may come to you with concerns based on misinformation. Rumors can spread like wildfire, and incorrect information can do a lot of damage. Refer them to credible information, such as the CDC website or the CDPHE website.

1. **Reassure clients.** If clients express concern, listening and validating concerns before offering advice or tips on precautions can help people through this process.  If clients ask about face masks, explain the CDC does not advise people to use face masks unless they are advised to do so by their health care provider or public health official. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/prevention-treatment.html>
2. **Reassure families**. Let families know that you have a plan.
3. **Educate client**s, family members and visitors about prevention practices, response, and precautions you are implementing to protect them, and explain why infection control precautions are necessary.
4. **Train**. Hold staff training on sources of exposure, prevention, recognizing symptoms, response when an outbreak has been identified, and communication protocols. Make sure staff gets the message to monitor and report any symptoms they or the clients have, and that all managers on duty know how to contact your local or state public health department if concerns arise.
5. **Communicate with your staff**. Review policies on sick leave and time off. Tell staff to speak up and stay home if they are not feeling well. You may want to check in at the beginning of work shifts to ask how staff are feeling. This applies to any temporary, on-call employment services and third-party health care providers as well--review policies with the agency and in person, when any other worker arrives. Keeping an infectious disease out of the community is worth the time.

**If you suspect someone in your agencies, homes and day programs may have COVID-19**

If a client, staff or family member exhibits symptoms associated with the coronavirus, take the following steps:

1. **Have them stay in a private room with the door closed,** while waiting for guidance from the health department. Place a facemask on the individual if you have them. Minimize the number of people who enter the room, ideally ONE healthcare person should be assigned or dedicated to working with that person. This minimizes the risk of transmission to other people in the home or agency and staff.
2. **Immediately** contact the person’s primary care physician and, if applicable, notify the client’s family/guardian as soon as practicable. (The emergency coronavirus funding includes waivers on some Medicare restrictions on telehealth, so you may be able to avoid going to the doctor’s office.)

3. **Notify** your local public health department or contact your state health department. To contact the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment Coronavirus Call Center, call 303-692-2700.

4. **Follow HIPAA** guidelines and protect the confidentiality of the individual wherever possible.

5. **Wear appropriate Personal Protective Equipment** (PPE) during close contact if you suspect someone in your community may have COVID-19. Follow health department guidance and [check this CDC page to prepare](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/healthcare-supply-ppe.html). Currently, the CDC recommends standard, contact and droplet precautions, and using a (1)facemask; (2) gowns; (3) gloves, and; (4) eye protection. If you do not have this equipment, you may check with neighboring health facilities or contact your local health department to inform them of your needs. [The CDC has a plan in place to mitigate shortages](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/healthcare-supply-ppe.html)

6. **If a physician recommends transport to a hospital** or treatment center, call to let the hospital know in advance that the person you’re bringing may be suspected of having COVID-19, so they can get their infection prevention plan into action. Similarly, notify EMS or an ambulance service in advance that the person they are transporting may be suspected of having COVID-19, so EMS personnel can be prepared.

7. Medical personnel can determine whether anyone with COVID-19 would be hospitalized or not. Not everyone with COVID-19 is hospitalized but may need quarantine in the home. If quarantine is needed, ensure the agency director is aware in order to provide support during this time.

**Be Prepared**:

1. **Review and update** emergency and outbreak plans, and practice or reinforce uncertain areas.
2. **Review security practices**: Go over or create new visitor policies for changing circumstances. You may need to ask clients, staff, and family about travel or exposure to persons with COVID-19. Travel advisories are changing, but generally, you’ll want to ask about any travel in the past 30 days as well as any planned travel by clients. The CDC has [travel advisory guidelines](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html) that list the changing levels of restrictions.
3. **Talk with suppliers and vendors**, and ask if they have any COVID-19 plans in place. If this is not already part of your emergency plan, sketch out a scenario of whatyou’d do if they couldn’t enter your agency, homes or day program sitey--and act as needed to prevent that outcome.
4. **Routinely review and follow** the guidance of your local and state health departments: This is the communication most critical to health. Viruses appear in clusters, so they’re best fought on the local level. Follow protocols given for state and local jurisdictions.
5. **Check supplies** of tissues, touchless trash cans, hand sanitizer, soap, gloves, food, linens, and personal protective equipment.
6. **Keep working** on basics of infection prevention.
7. **Check your staff’s level of cross training**. What would happen if staff get sick and are unable to come to work?
8. **Review and update your communication plans**. Identify who on your staff will be a spokesperson for your agency if you are contacted by a member of the media, and ensure that all staff are aware of who this is and how to reach them.
9. **Protect your employees**. As you work to protect clients and employees, staying in compliance with employment law is important. Consult the [CDC Guidance for Business and Employers](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-business-response.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fspecific-groups%2Fguidance-business-response.html) and [OSHA guidance](https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/covid-19/) for preventing workplace exposure.

Review *The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission’s* [Americans with Disabilities Act Pandemic Preparedness Guidance,](https://www.eeoc.gov/facts/pandemic_flu.html) and the [OSHA pandemic factsheet.](https://www.osha.gov/Publications/OSHAFS-3747.pdf)

An outbreak could also trigger policies around the Fair Labor Standards Act and the Family Medical Leave Act. The [Society for Human Resources Management, SHRM,](https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/legal-and-compliance/employment-law/pages/coronavirus-information-and-faqs.aspx) has a coronavirus FAQ page that can help.

1. **Review best practices for social distancing.** Prepare for possible changes in dining service. Clients may be limited to their rooms if they become ill, or the dining areas may need to be closed and clients eat in alternative spaces.

Group activities may need to stop.

Clients might want to keep some magazines, cards, or other entertainment in their rooms.

Ensure your kitchen is prepared to serve meals in client rooms. Ensure you have a supply of disposable cups, plates, napkins and utensils that can be thrown away. Don’t go through the kitchen after leaving a room with a sick person.

Schedule or plan to visit clients’ rooms to check on them and give assistance if needed. Practice social distance: Keep about three feet between yourself and anyone coughing or sneezing.

1. **Follow the guidance** issued by state and local health departments.
2. **Review medication management processes** for emergencies. Follow policy for medications in a congregate care environment, as you would for the flu, such as antibiotic stewardship. They are not recommending stockpiling or excessive purchasing.
3. **Have a plan** for suspending prospect tours and limiting new client admissions in the event of an outbreak in your community.

**Additional References for this document & Resource Links**

Steps Healthcare Facilities Can Take Now to Prepare for Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/healthcare-facilities/steps-to-prepare.html>

The Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services has issued [FAQS for healthcare providers regarding Medicare billing and payment](https://www.cms.gov/newsroom/press-releases/covid-19-response-news-alert-cms-issues-frequently-asked-questions-assist-medicare-providers).

Argentum Coronavirus Preparation and Response Toolkit, <https://www.argentum.org/coronavirustoolkit/>

[Interim Health Care Infection Prevention and Control Recommendations for Patients Under Investigation for Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/hcp/infection-control.html).

CMS FAQs <https://www.cms.gov/newsroom/press-releases/covid-19-response-news-alert-cms-issues-frequently-asked-questions-assist-medicare-providers>

Follow the [CDC website](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html) to keep up with the general trends and what’s happening. Communicating with your [state health department](https://www.colorado.gov/cdphe) and watching local news will help you with specifics.

For specific information, please call the CDPHE Call Center at 303-692-2700.

For general questions about COVID-19: Call CO-Help at 303-389-1687 or

1-877-462-2911 or email COHELP@RMPDC.org, for answers in English and

Spanish (Español), Mandarin (普通话), and more.