

# COVID-19 (Novel Coronavirus) Update for Community Agencies

## Information for Elgin, Oxford and St. Thomas Agencies Serving Vulnerable Community Members

**March 14, 2020**

In December 2019, Chinese health authorities identified a new (or novel) coronavirus (referred to as COVID-19) through a series of reported cases of pneumonia in Wuhan, China. This illness has now been declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization as it has infected 120,000+ individuals in more than 100 countries.

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that circulate both in humans and animals. Human coronaviruses are common and may be associated with mild illness, like the common cold and more severe illnesses such as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS).

Coronaviruses spread through **droplets** from an infected person who coughs or sneezes. Through these virus-laden droplets, it can spread to people who you spend a lot of time with (close contacts) such as household members – similar to how the flu and other respiratory illnesses spread. It can also live on surfaces and infect a person who touches that surface and then touches their eyes, mouth or nose. Symptoms include fever, cough, shortness of breath and fatigue. Complications can include serious conditions like pneumonia or kidney failure, and death.

Settings that provide temporary housing, congregate living or dining spaces or other services for people who are experiencing homelessness or who are underhoused (e.g., shelters, meal services, respite sites, drop-in centres, rooming houses, Out of the Cold sites) are extremely diverse and experience unique issues in relation to the population and the people served.

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## What you should do:

- **Ask sick staff, visitors/volunteers to stay home.** Staff, visitors/volunteers who have symptoms of acute respiratory illness are recommended to stay home and not attend the setting until they are symptom free for 24 – 48 hours. Staff should notify their supervisor and stay home if they are sick.
- **Ask sick staff, visitors/volunteers to separate themselves from others if they become sick at the setting.** Staff and visitors/volunteers who have acute respiratory illness symptoms (i.e. cough, shortness of breath) and fever upon arrival to the setting and those who become sick during the day should be separated from others, supported to access health care services if severely ill, or sent home immediately.
- **Support clients/participants to identify if they have symptoms of acute respiratory illness (i.e., recent changes in a pre-existing chronic cough if applicable, new onset of fever, shortness of breath). Help them access appropriate healthcare. Call ahead to notify the setting you are sending them to.**
- **Advise staff planning to travel to visit the Government of Canada Travel Advisory webpage:** <https://travel.gc.ca/travelling/health-safety/travel-health-notices/221>
- **Ask all staff, visitors/volunteers, clients/participants to engage in regular and frequent hand hygiene (i.e. cleaning hands).** Avoid shaking hands or hugging people while this virus is circulating in our community.
- **Post Hand Washing and Hand Sanitizing posters in visible locations around the setting.** Make sure that hand washing posters are posted in washrooms and above sinks and that there are hand sanitizing posters near alcohol-based hand rub (ABHR) dispensers. If having wall-mounted alcohol-based hand rub (ABHR) is not feasible, consider providing portable ABHR to staff. Alcohol-based hand rub should have an alcohol concentration between 70% and 90%.

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- Offer supervised hand hygiene for clients (e.g., have a staff member pump alcohol-based hand rub (ABHR) into client's/participant's hands as they enter the dining area).
- Ensure liquid hand soap and alcohol-based hand rub dispensers are checked regularly and are kept full.
- Post **Cover your Cough** posters in visible locations around the setting.
- Ask clients/participants to not share items that touch the mouth or nose (e.g., drug-use equipment, straws, utensils, cigarettes).
- Make sure that environmental cleaning (with soap and water) and disinfection (with quaternary disinfectant) is performed on a routine and consistent basis and that this is also discussed with any contracted cleaning company/agency. Ensure special attention to:
  - ✓ High-touch surfaces (e.g., doorknobs, light switches, handrails)
  - ✓ Common areas (e.g., dining rooms, sleeping quarters, bathrooms)
  - ✓ Shared equipment (e.g., telephones, computer keyboard, walkie-talkies)

The service you provide to our community has never been more important than it is now. Although social distancing may be challenging in your setting, we encourage you to do what you can to keep your doors open. If you need more specific guidance, please don't hesitate to call.

**For up-to-date COVID-19 information call our infectious diseases team at  
1-800-922-0096 (prompt #8) or visit our community Q & A.**