Coronavirus Disease:  
What you can do to prepare in the homeless services sector

March 4, 2020

You’ve probably heard a lot about a new (novel) Coronavirus called COVID-19. The Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) is working with the City of Los Angeles, the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health (DPH) along with the Department of Health Services, Department of Mental Health and other key Federal partners to promote effective hygiene, to prevent and address potential Coronavirus infections among those experiencing homelessness, and how to keep staff safe. As there has not yet been any community transmission here in LA County, our goal is to focus on prevention and preparation without provoking panic.

2019-nCoV is new, and entities are learning more each day about how easily it spreads and how long it takes for people to become sick. As information becomes available, public health entities are keeping us updated. We’ll be sharing more information as soon as materials and guidance are released. Until then, here’s some COVID-19 basics as shared by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health (DPH) as of March 2, 2020.

**Transmission**
Experts believe that COVID-19 is spread mainly from person-to-person in the following ways:

- Between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet).
- 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 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 mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes, but experts do not believe that this is the main way the virus spreads.

Experts believe that people are most contagious when they are most symptomatic (the sickest).

Some spread might be possible before people show symptoms; there have been reports of this occurring with this new coronavirus, but experts do not believe that this is the main way the virus spreads.


**Prevention**
Tips for both staff and clients include:

- 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 [https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/when-how-handwashing.html](https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/when-how-handwashing.html)
- Post handwashing signs throughout your site and provide training on good hand hygiene for staff and clients
- For facilities, install and distribute hand sanitizer with at least 70% alcohol content throughout your facility.
- For outreach teams, distribution of hand sanitizer with at least 70% alcohol content and promote its use to street-based clients and staff.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaning spray or wipe.
- Ensure staff have access to disposable gloves and know how to use and discard safely.
- Get a flu shot. Since COVID-19 disease symptoms may mimic influenza, getting immunized for flu is very important.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth. Promote this among clients and fellow staff.
- If you’re sick, stay at home. Experts recommend that staff who have symptoms of acute respiratory illness stay home and not come to work until they are free of fever (100.4° F or greater using an oral thermometer), signs of a fever, and any other symptoms for at least 24 hours, without the use of fever-reducing or other symptom-altering medicines (e.g., cough suppressants).
- Facemasks should be used only by people who show symptoms of COVID-19 to help prevent the spread of the disease to others. The use of facemasks is also crucial for healthcare workers and people who are taking care of someone in close settings (at home or in a healthcare facility).


**Symptoms, Assessment, and Treatment**

Reported illnesses have ranged from mild symptoms to severe illness and death for confirmed coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) cases.

Symptoms may appear 2-14 days after exposure:

- Fever
- Cough
- Shortness of breath
- People who think they may have been exposed to COVID-19 should contact their healthcare provider immediately.

If a client is exhibiting symptoms, contact their healthcare provider immediately for further instructions. Make sure you keep a distance of 6 feet. If you have access to masks, ensure the person with symptoms wears one until further direction of a healthcare provider. **We expect more guidance on both facility and street-based protocols for those with potential infections. We will share it when available.**


**Other helpful resources**

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) also has a wealth of information on their websites [https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html) including FAQs, Situation Updates, and information for specific audiences.

The County of Los Angeles Department of Public Health (DPH) launched a Coronavirus portal [http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/media/Coronavirus/](http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/media/Coronavirus/) with FAQs, handwashing guidance, and other valuable information for Angelenos. They also launched a valuable #NCVFacts campaign on Twitter.

The US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) just released its Infectious Disease Toolkit for CoCs. This toolkit provides structure and specific examples for planning and responding to Influenza, Coronavirus, and other infectious diseases. The toolkit consists of three documents that provide information for CoC leadership, homeless service providers, and partners to utilize when planning for and responding to infectious diseases.[https://www.hudexchange.info/resource/5985/infectious-disease-toolkit-for-cocs/](https://www.hudexchange.info/resource/5985/infectious-disease-toolkit-for-cocs/)

OrgCode released a blog entitled “Pandemic Planning and Services that Support People Who are Homeless.

[https://www.orgcode.com/pandemic_planning_and_services_that_support_people_who_are_homeless](https://www.orgcode.com/pandemic_planning_and_services_that_support_people_who_are_homeless)

We recommend that you take a look at these resources and check back often as the issue is quickly evolving.
LAHSA is a joint powers authority of the city and county of Los Angeles, created in 1993 to address the problem of homelessness in Los Angeles County. LAHSA is the lead agency in the HUD-funded Los Angeles Continuum of Care, and coordinates and manages over $400 million annually in federal, state, county, and city funds for programs providing shelter, housing, and services to people experiencing homelessness.