

## ***Interim Guidance for Housing Providers updated March 23, 2020***

***\*\*Disclaimer: Materials may contain language copied from guidance developed by other communities. Source documents used will be listed at the bottom of this page.***

Dane County and The City of Madison are partnering with local agencies to protect our neighbors in supportive housing programs from the spread of the novel coronavirus COVID-19.

Supportive housing providers are a vital support to people in our community who have experienced homelessness. These providers work to help people obtain and maintain their housing. This work often requires case managers to work with people in their homes. Site-based housing may have shared common areas where residents congregate for meals or activities. Tenants in Single Room Occupancy (SRO) units may share a kitchen and lounge with their neighbors.

However, many supportive housing tenants have experienced homelessness and are managing multiple health conditions. This can make them particularly vulnerable to the spread of communicable diseases.

Precautions must be taken now to help protect this segment of our population.

### **How COVID-19 spreads**

**The virus spreads mainly between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet).** This happens when droplets from an infected person's coughs or sneezes gets into another person's mouth, nose, lungs.

Someone is also at-risk for infection if they touch a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touches their own mouth, nose, or their eyes.

Objects or surfaces can become contaminated with virus from cough/sneeze droplets landing on them, or from the sick person coughing or sneezing into their own hand then touching an object.

**Please follow the steps below to help protect those accessing congregate settings, and minimize the chance of introducing or spreading communicable diseases like COVID-19 in supportive housing programs.**

## **Guidance for mask use**

Outside of a healthcare setting, masks are most effectively used by sick individuals to prevent spread of their secretions and cough droplets to others.

## **Mask use for tenants**

Supportive housing providers should identify tenants who have a new, worse or different cough.

- These tenants should wear masks in common areas to contain secretions or droplets.
- Staff can demonstrate correct mask use in order to assist tenants.

Masks are only effective in their intended use if they are used properly. The following rules must be followed for correct mask use:

- The mask should fit snugly over the face.
- The colored side of the mask faces outwards.
- The strings or elastic bands are positioned properly to keep the mask firmly in place.
- The mask covers both your nose and mouth.
- The metallic strip is molded to the bridge of your nose.

[Watch this video to learn how to put on a surgical mask correctly.](#)

(link is external)

If masks are not available, tenants should cover their face with a handkerchief or scarf. While not ideal, this will provide some protection.

## **Mask use for staff and volunteers**

- Staff and volunteers should not come in if they are feeling sick.
- Any staff or volunteers who become sick at work should be sent home and should remain at home until they are well.
- Healthy staff and volunteers should not wear masks unless they are providing direct care to sick tenants.
- Staff and volunteers should wash or sanitize hands frequently, and try not to touch their face.

## **Preparing your supportive housing program**

Making precautionary adjustments to facilities and operations can help prevent the introduction or spread of COVID-19 in these congregate settings.

## **Front Desk**

If your facility has a front desk where tenants and visitors stop, put as much space between staff and tenants/visitors as possible. For example, install a sneeze guard or keep at least 6 feet of distance between staff and tenants/guests. You may use the COVID-19 Screener to assess tenants and visitors for symptoms.

## **Kitchens, restrooms and other common areas**

We know tenants interact closely in dining, restroom and other common areas.

**Where space allows, follow 6 foot social distancing recommendations.**

Congregate or public meals should be avoided whenever possible. People can eat in their rooms/apartments or can eat outside with appropriate social distancing. When able shift to prepackaged meals that are not served from a single open container.

If someone in the housing project is ill, set up a meal delivery option so they do not need to come to the common kitchen.

Please be diligent in following hygiene and food safety rules about keeping food covered, not using personal utensils in shared containers, washing hands before eating and handling shared objects, and cleaning kitchen surfaces and dining areas between use.

Tenants who are coughing may occupy shared space such as restrooms if they are masked properly.

If the facility has shared restrooms, when possible designate a restroom for use by tenants who are exhibiting symptoms. Tenants who are coughing should still mask when accessing the designated restroom. Door knobs, faucets, etc. should be disinfected before and after use.

If tenants have roommates and one develops symptoms, have them isolate in a vacant room, if available.

If you are struggling with isolation in shared living spaces, please contact Torrie at [tkoppmueller@cityofmadison.com](mailto:tkoppmueller@cityofmadison.com).

## **Cleaning and disinfecting**

Increase the frequency of your routine cleaning and disinfection program to the extent feasible.

Emphasize cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched objects and surfaces like bathrooms, water coolers, desks, countertops, doorknobs, computer keyboards, hands-on learning items, faucet handles, phones and toys.

Special cleaning procedures and products are not necessary as long as there are standard procedures for cleaning and disinfecting with an Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) registered disinfectant with a claim for human coronaviruses.

Custodial or environmental services staff should follow the disinfectant manufacturer's instructions for use including:

- Using the proper concentrations of disinfectant.
- Allowing required wet contact time.

Please call your janitorial supply company, or if applicable, your janitorial vendor, to confirm proper cleaning protocols are being carried out and that your vendors have adequate supply of cleaning materials.

If providers are experiencing shortages in this area, please escalate specific needs to [hsc@cityofmadison.com](mailto:hsc@cityofmadison.com).

## **Supporting hand and respiratory hygiene**

- Post signage about proper cough and sneeze etiquette in kitchens, bathrooms and common areas.
- Make tissues available with trash cans and hand hygiene options nearby.
- Ensure that any sink is well-stocked with soap and paper towels.

## **Hand sanitizer and hand washing**

The most important measure for preventing the spread of pathogens is effective hand hygiene.

- Remind all staff, volunteers, tenants and visitors to clean their hands according to [CDC guidelines](#)

(link is external)

- Have hand sanitizer (minimum 60% alcohol) available near points of entry.

- Washing with warm water and soap is just as effective as hand sanitizer. Promote both.
- Post signage, verbally cue people and have staff model good hand washing/sanitizing behavior.
- Make sure that you have adequate supplies for good hand hygiene, including clean and functional hand washing stations, soap, paper towels, trash receptacles and alcohol-based sanitizer.

If providers are experiencing shortages in this area, please escalate specific needs to [hsc@cityofmadison.com](mailto:hsc@cityofmadison.com).

### **Providing support services during a pandemic**

- Although the way staff interact with tenants will change, please continue to provide services. This is a vulnerable population who often rely on services to maintain their housing and for assistance in meeting their needs. This is a time when services will be needed more than ever.
- Plan to protect clients and staff by postponing non-urgent services, increasing services provided by phone or online instead of in-person.
- Assist clients to gather resources they would need to stay at home for up to 2 weeks if they become sick or need to socially distance (such as medication refills).
- During crisis situations, health conditions can be exacerbated if health care regimens are not maintained, or if histories of trauma trigger high-risk behaviors. This can increase risk for infection.
- Reassure tenants by sharing info about what they can do to prepare at home
- Identify which tenants are able to manage their own health and which ones will need extra support in order to be sure they report symptoms and reach out to appropriate medical personnel as needed.

### **Acquiring essential supplies**

- Households may struggle to acquire essential supplies: food, medication, hygiene products, information
- Support services should work with tenants to prepare to be at home for up to 2 weeks by providing basic needs and preparing for crisis intervention should medical or behavioral conditions deteriorate.
- Ensure that tenants have an adequate supply of medications. Assist in calling the pharmacy to see if they can get a refill in advance of needing it. Ask the pharmacy if the tenant can get a 3 month supply.

If providers are experiencing shortages in this area, please escalate specific needs to [hsc@cityofmadison.com](mailto:hsc@cityofmadison.com)

## **Households with children**

With schools closed, this will potentially be a very stressful situation for households with children.

- Alternate care will need to be arranged for younger children. Work with households to identify supports in their lives who can assist.
- There will be an increased need for food at home. Children may have been eating breakfast and lunch at school 5 days each week. Families will need more food.
- An increase in at-home time for the whole family may lead to boredom and frustration. Talk with caretakers about how they will care for themselves and make sure they get a break. What will they do when feeling stress?
- Assist in coming up with lists of activities kids can do at home. Can you provide “kid kits?” Boxes with books, paper, markers, card games, etc.
- Madison Metropolitan School District posts updates on their [webpage](#)

## **Eviction prevention**

- Recognize that many people are without work during this time and will be unable to pay rent.
- If rent is based on tenant income and tenant has lost income, recalculate the monthly rent amount.
- If you are the landlord, proactively reach out to tenants to learn more about their income situation. Work with tenants to figure out how rent will be paid (unemployment, eviction prevention resources, friends/family/savings). Work on preliminary payment plans based on when the tenant believes they can return to work.
- If the tenant pays rent directly to a landlord (not the agency), assist the tenant in reaching out proactively to the landlord to alert them to their loss of income. Talk with the landlord about their plans for pursuing evictions during the pandemic. Propose a payment plan for rent that may involve assistance from the housing program. Remember if it is a project based voucher, the tenant must report income changes to the housing authority. Please assist in making this contact.
- If a tenant is hosting another household and the household is not causing significant issues, please allow them to stay. It is recognized this may be a violation of the lease. However, shelters are struggling to accommodate all guests and maintain appropriate social distancing. It is ideal for the household to sleep in the same location each night with the same people.

## **SOURCES:**

*Multnomah County, OR guidance for COVID-19 guidance for congregate and shelter settings:*  
<https://multco.us/novel-coronavirus-covid-19/covid-19-guidance-congregate-and-shelter-settings>

*CSH: What supportive housing providers need to know*

<https://d155kunxf1aozz.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Coronavirus-Disease-2019-COVID-19-1.pdf>