The West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources, Bureau for Public Health (BPH) continues to respond to the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in West Virginia. BPH is working closely with communities, state agencies, local and federal partners to monitor the ongoing risk of COVID-19 and ensure the health and protection of all individuals in West Virginia.

This guidance is intended for the centers providing service to seniors, to help them prevent the spread of SARS-CoV-2 virus in their facilities in order to ensure the health and safety of their staff and clients during the COVID-19 pandemic.

COMMON SYMPTOMS OF COVID-19
- Fever
- Cough
- Shortness of breath
- Chills
- Muscle pain
- Sore throat
- Recent loss of taste or smell

PERSON-TO-PERSON TRANSMISSION
- Occurs via small droplets from the nose or mouth of the infected person when they cough, sneeze, or exhale.
- Virus can remain on surfaces for a limited time period. Although less common, transmission may occur from touching contaminated surfaces and then touching your eyes, nose or mouth.

GENERAL PREVENTION
- Learn about COVID-19 from reputable sources.
- Maintain physical distance of at least 6 feet between yourself and others.
- Encourage proper handwashing.
- Clean and sanitize surfaces often.
- Do not share food, drinks, etc.
- Wear cloth face coverings.
- Stay home if you feel sick.
- Isolate sick individuals.

WHO IS AT RISK FOR SEVERE ILLNESS?
Some people are at a higher risk of getting very sick from this illness, including older adults and individuals who have serious chronic medical conditions like heart disease, diabetes, or lung disease. If an individual is at a higher risk for serious illness from COVID-19 due to their age or having a serious long-term health condition, it is extra important to take actions to reduce their risk of getting sick with the disease.

WHAT STEPS SHOULD BE TAKEN NOW?
There are steps that can be taken to manage this issue and protect those in your center or agency. Many are the same strategies used every day to prevent the spread of common colds, influenza, or other respiratory illnesses. Build on your center’s or agency’s everyday practices to implement these strategies.
- Educate yourself, staff, and clients about COVID-19.
- Stay informed about COVID-19 through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and your state and local health department. For the most up-to-date information on COVID-19, visit www.coronavirus.wv.gov or www.cdc.gov/COVID19.
- Help staff and client families understand COVID-19 and the steps they can take to protect themselves by sharing these fact sheets from the CDC:
  - About Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) – What you need to know
  - Get your household ready for COVID-19 (Resources for Home)
  - What to do if you are a person at risk of serious illness from COVID-19
  - What to do if you get sick with COVID-19
- Establish good communication capability with clients and their families so you can provide guidance and/or share information in case there is a need to close services for any reason.
- Establish good communication with your local health department, local emergency management, and other community resources.
Take part in community wide planning for COVID-19.

- Develop or review business continuity plans for how to keep critical services going if staffing levels drop due to illness or taking care of ill family members or children that may be dismissed from childcare or school settings. Critical services may include providing nutritional services to clients or checking on clients who become ill to see if they require medical attention.

**REDUCE THE RISK OF DISEASE SPREAD THROUGH ENHANCEMENT OF ROUTINE PRACTICES**

- Post signs throughout the facility encouraging hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette, and avoid touching your face with unwashed hands.
- Place alcohol-based hand sanitizer at all entry points and key points in the facility as possible. If not possible, use signs that direct to the nearest sink to wash hands with soap and water. Assist clients and others who have physical difficulties performing hand hygiene and ensure the assisting person performs hand hygiene themselves after assisting. Pay special attention to hand hygiene before eating, after coughing or sneezing, using tissues, or other activities that result in hand-to-face activity.
- Encourage clients, families, volunteers and visitors to stay home if sick. Post signs to regularly remind persons of such.
- If a staff member, client, or other visitor gets sick while present, place a mask on the individual and get them home or to the level of care they need.
- As feasible, consider grouping staff and clients into smaller groupings that remain stable over time.

**PREPARING AND EDUCATING STAFF, VOLUNTEERS, AND CLIENTS**

- Think about how you might function with reduced staffing and how you might augment if staff members are out sick or have to stay home to care for family members or children.
- Review or modify sick leave and other absence policies to assure they are flexible and non-punitive to allow employees or volunteers to stay home if they have symptoms of acute respiratory illness or if they need to care for a sick family member. Make sure your employees or volunteers are aware of these policies. Do not require healthcare provider notes to validate illness or return to work, as healthcare provider offices and medical facilities may be extremely busy and unable to provide this documentation.
- If visitors, volunteers, employees, attendees, and others become ill while at the facility, they should be separated from others and sent home as soon as possible. Make sure your employees, volunteers, visitors, and clients are aware of these policies.
- Those with respiratory illness symptoms should stay out and not return until they are free of fever or signs of a fever, and any other symptoms for at least 24 hours, without use of fever-reducing or other symptom-altering medicines.

**WHAT DO YOU DO IF AN INDIVIDUAL ASSOCIATED WITH THE CENTER IS EXPOSED TO COVID-19?**

If an individual is identified as having been exposed to COVID-19 (e.g., through travel to an area with community transmission, close contact to a known case, etc.) and has no symptoms of the disease, they need to stay home for 14 days from their last exposure. This period of self-quarantine allows them to watch for signs of illness and reduce spread to others if they do develop the disease.

**WHAT IF AN INDIVIDUAL ASSOCIATED WITH THE CENTER DEVELOPS COVID-19?**

Working with your local health department, there may be a need to close on-site group services for 14 days or to identify any secondary cases before the group comes back together. Plan for ways you might be able to help public health check in on your clients remotely during this time. Also plan for things staff and clients can do to stay connected while home.

**HOW DOES THE GUIDANCE ON DIFFERENT ALTERNATIVES TO 14-DAY QUARANTINE AFFECT SENIOR CENTERS?**

The CDC has recently updated their guidance on releasing contact persons from quarantine, based on new evidence, where alternatives to 14-day quarantine period are recommended to balance between the benefit of self-quarantine and the burden of staying at home and being away from work. Due to the risk of more severe illness from COVID-19 in the elderly population, the 14-day quarantine recommendation remains unchanged for individuals who may have been exposed to someone with COVID-19 and who are either staff in senior services or are associated with these centers.
WHAT IF THERE IS A CLOSURE OF GROUP OR COMMUNITY SERVICES (FOR AN INDIVIDUAL CENTER OR ACROSS A COMMUNITY MORE BROADLY)?

- Plan for checking in on clients remotely. (You can keep staff present to do this work/other administrative functions while closed, as needed).
- Consider use of staff by having volunteers deliver services, drop off food or provide other supports to clients during times of closure. This will minimize face-to-face exposure, but let staff know you are thinking about them, providing resources and supplies, checking in that all are doing well, etc.
- Consider other ways you can link to and provide socialization and support without large on-site gatherings such as remote presentations, webinars, conference call presentations, and outdoor gatherings in consistent small groups once weather is nice, etc.

Questions and concerns can also be directed to the 24/7, toll-free COVID-19 information hotline:

1-800-887-4304