

Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Senior Center Guidance March 2020

What is Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)?

COVID-19 is a respiratory illness that can spread from person-to-person. The virus that causes COVID-19 is a new coronavirus that was first identified during an investigation into an outbreak in Wuhan, China. The first case of COVID-19 in the U.S. was reported on January 21, 2020; COVID-19 is now spreading from person-to-person in parts of the U.S. Risk of infection with COVID-19 is higher for people who are close contacts of someone known to have COVID-19, for example, healthcare workers or household members. Other people at higher risk for infection are those who live in or have recently been in an area with ongoing spread of COVID-19.

How Does COVID-19 Spread?

Based on what is currently known about this virus, it is thought to spread mainly from person-to-person. Person-to-person spread occurs via respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes, similar to how influenza and other respiratory pathogens spread. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs. Most often, person-to-person spread is thought to happen among people in close contact (about 6 feet) with each other. As with most respiratory viruses, people are likely to be the most contagious when they are most symptomatic. 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.

Who is at Risk for Severe Illness?

Early information out of China, where COVID-19 first started, shows that some people are at a higher risk of getting very sick from this illness. This includes 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 now to manage this issue and protect those in your center or agency. Many of these strategies 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 this outbreak, please 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 \(COVID19\) – 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 communications 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 communications 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.
- Check in on clients who don't come or if you are unaware of where they are.

Preparing and educating staff, volunteers, and clients

- Think about how you might function with reduced staffing and how you might augment staffing if several 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 providers' 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, 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.

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 to deliver services, drop off food or other supports to clients during times of closure. This will minimize face-to-face exposure, but let folks 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.

For additional information visit our webpage at: www.coronavirus.wv.gov.

Questions and concerns can also be directed to the 24/7, toll-free COVID-19 information hotline, 1-800-887-4304.