

Commonwealth of Massachusetts
**DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING &
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

Charles D. Baker, Governor ♦ Karyn E. Polito, Lt. Governor ♦ Jennifer D. Maddox, Undersecretary

EA Family Shelter COVID-19 Screening Guidance for Congregate Family Shelter

This interim guidance is based on what is currently known about the transmission and severity of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). The Department of Housing and Community Development is working closely with the Executive Office of Health and Human Services and the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to provide updated information about the novel coronavirus outbreak.

This guidance will be updated as needed and as additional information is available. Please regularly check mass.gov/covid19 for updated interim guidance.

Each organization faces specific challenges associated with implementation based on its population, physical space, staffing, etc., and will need to tailor these guidelines accordingly. This guidance is intended to supplement, not supplant, contracts with the Department of Housing and Community Development. Organizations may develop their own policies, but these policies should be based on current science and facts, not fear, and they should never compromise a program participant's or employee's health.

DHCD is encouraging EA congregate and co-shelter providers to institute informal **COVID-19 screening process** for any new intakes and families returning to shelter after an extended amount of time away from the shelter (i.e. >6 hours). Additionally, DHCD has provided guidance about what to do when clients test positive for COVID-19.

The following is a simple screening tool that can be used to identify people with symptoms that indicate they might have a respiratory infection. Although not every person who has respiratory infection symptoms will have coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), using this tool during community spread of COVID-19 may help separate those who are more likely to have COVID-19 from the general population at entry to a homeless shelter or other homeless service program.

If someone screens positive for symptoms, they should be directed to where they can stay, either within the shelter or at another location, according to a predesignated plan developed by the shelter or referred to DHCD, local boards of health and or MEMA/DPH.

Level 1: Primary Screening for Symptoms:

1. Determine if the client has a fever, by:

- Taking their temperature using a temporal thermometer (Any temperature 100.4 F or greater is considered a fever.)
- Asking "Have you felt like you had a fever in the past day?"

2. Ask the client "Do you have a new or worsening cough today?"

If the client has a fever OR a new/worsening cough:

1. Provide a facemask for the client to wear over their nose and mouth, if facemasks are available and if the client can tolerate it. If facemasks are not available, advise the client on cough etiquette and provide tissues.
2. Direct them to an isolation room or unit, if available, or an available space away from other staff and families
3. Let the client know:
 - If their symptoms worsen, they should notify someone immediately
 - Not to leave their room/the symptomatic area except to use the restroom
 - If they leave their room/the symptomatic area, they must wear a mask
4. Have the family contact medical provider immediately; the medical provider should be informed that that family is in a congregate shelter and if there are any underlying health issues, such as asthma or a compromised immune system. Shelter providers should contact their local Board of Health and DHCD and follow all medical instructions
5. Families that screen positive for symptoms will need to self-isolate until medical intervention occurs and COVID-19 is confirmed or determined to be negative. Shelters should work with each individual family to determine a safe location for their isolation period – i.e. with friends or family, a designated shelter unit or scattered site if available, or an alternative MEMA placement.

If the symptoms are severe and the family member is in distress, call 911 immediately.

Level 2: Additional Screening for Exposure:

If the family is not presenting with a fever, dry cough, sore throat, continue to ask the following screening question:

1. Have you, or anyone in your household, had contact with anyone with a confirmed or presumed COVID-19 diagnosis in the last 14 days?
2. Have you, or any members of household experienced a high fever (over 100.4 degrees F), had difficulty breathing, had a cough, and/or sore throat in the last 14 days but no longer present?

If the answer is *YES* to any of the questions,

- Family should be required to self-quarantine for 14 days, as well as contact medical provider to determine if testing needs to be done.

Self-Quarantine Overview:

- Using standard hygiene and washing hands frequently.
- Not sharing things like towels and utensils.
- Staying in your room/unit as much as possible, practice social distancing in common areas of the shelter, and limit trips to local stores for food and necessary supply items.
- Not having visitors.
- Staying at least 6 feet away from other people in your household/shelter.

If someone has been tested and/or are presumptive pending COVID-19 test results, they should follow all directives from the medical care providers and/or local board of health. Households should be directed to where they can stay, either within the shelter or at another location, according to a predesignated plan developed by the shelter which could include the use of an offline scattered site or alternative placement.

The following guidelines can be used by shelters when responding to a positive COVID-19 test among their clientele:

Single-parent households

- **If a parent in a single-parent household tests positive for COVID-19 but the children are well**, the parent can isolate at an Isolation and Recovery Site (IRS) until they recover, at which time they can return to the shelter. Alternative caretakers, such as other family members, should be identified to care for the children while the parent is in isolation. If alternative caretakers cannot be identified, the shelter should contact DHCD to discuss other options.
- **If an entire single-parent household (including children) has tested positive for COVID-19**, the whole family can isolate at an IRS until they recover, at which time they can return to the shelter.

Two-parent households

- **If one parent in a two-parent household tests positive for COVID-19 but the rest of the family are well**, the COVID-positive parent can isolate at an IRS until they recover, at which time they can return to the shelter. The rest of the family can remain in shelter. If the COVID-positive parent refuses to isolate at an IRS, the shelter should contact DHCD to discuss other options.
- **If both parents in a two-parent household test positive for COVID-19 but the children are well**, the parents can isolate at an Isolation and Recovery Site (IRS) until they recover, at which time they can return to the shelter. Alternative caretakers, such as other family members, should be identified to care for the children while the parents are in isolation. If alternative caretakers cannot be identified, the shelter should contact DHCD to discuss other options.
- **If an entire two-parent household (including children) has tested positive for COVID-19**, the whole family can isolate at an IRS until they recover, at which time they can return to the shelter.

For any of the scenarios above, shelters should reach out to DHCD to discuss other options if family members refuse to isolate at an IRS. DHCD can also support shelters with placements at Isolation and Recovery Sites as needed.

Please remind ALL families to be vigilant about hand washing, social distancing and cleaning protocols and to alert staff immediately if they have any symptoms and/or learn that they may have been exposed.

Sources:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/homeless-shelters/screening-clients-respiratory-infection-symptoms.html>

<https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/imm/guidance-for-congregate-settings-covid19.pdf>

<https://www.commerce.wa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Seattle-King-County-Interim-Guidance-COVID-19-Homeless-Service-Providers.pdf>