

March 11, 2020

Recommendations for Homeless Camps

Basics about how COVID-19 is spread

COVID-19 or novel coronavirus has symptoms similar to the flu. People with symptoms have fevers, coughs and also shortness of breath. The virus spreads mainly from person-to-person, between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet). This happens by droplets from an infected person's coughs or sneezes getting into another person's mouth, nose, or eyes. If a well person touches a surface, object, or a sick person's hand that has the virus on it from the sick person's cough/sneeze droplets, the virus can infect the well person when they touch their own mouth or nose.

Most people recover without medical intervention and have mild symptoms. But certain people do face a higher risk of having more severe symptoms, including pneumonia. Those folks tend to be older, have weakened immune systems or have underlying medical conditions (things like heart or lung diseases). COVID-19 is new, but the work to address it isn't. It builds on the work and planning already in place to address other communicable diseases like flu, measles and shigella.

Steps to limit the spread of infections

- Hand-washing is important, but we recognize that access to hand-washing facilities is limited for folks living without shelter. Sanitizer is also effective. If someone is sick, washing or sanitizing hands will help them not spread germs from their lungs or nose to other things they touch. If they are well, taking these steps will help them not pick up germs from things they touch and spread them to their mouth, nose or eyes.
- Folks should do what they can to avoid touching their noses, eyes, and mouths.
- Cover coughs: Any cough, even if someone otherwise feels well, should be covered — not with someone's hands but by coughing into an elbow, a mask or a bandana.

- As much as possible, encourage those you're working with to limit sharing personal items, particularly cigarettes, food, phones, utensils and other items.

Hygiene and cleaning

When possible, use disinfectant wipes that say “kills human coronavirus” on the back. Follow the instructions on the label. Most important is to not dry off whatever is wiped with sanitizer or a wipe. Whatever is wiped will need to stay wet for the amount of time listed on the label. This step is important because that contact time is what is required to kill the germs. Wipes can be used to clean high-touch items like phones and other surfaces.

Masks

People who are sick and coughing should have access to, and wear, masks. Masks will help contain droplets that can spread the novel coronavirus. Outreach workers should identify those who have a new, worse or different cough. The masks they wear will contain secretions or droplets. Masks are only effective when 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 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9VbojLQe94>) about correct mask use.

Outreach workers and volunteers should not work when they are feeling sick and should not spend time with potentially vulnerable people during that period. Healthy people should not wear masks unless they are spending extended time in an area designated for guests with coughs or providing direct care to sick guests. When taking off a mask, fold it in half, inside in, and throw it away so the germs don't spread. If someone doesn't have a mask, a bandana is probably better than nothing to contain their droplets from coughs and sneezes.

Setting up a campsite to limit the spread of infection

As much as possible, people who are camping should work to separate individuals with respiratory illness symptoms (coughing, fever, shortness of breath) from those without. This will stop the sick person's respiratory droplets from getting into a well person through the air. This is helpful even if coughing

people are wearing masks, and it's especially important if there are no masks. Outdoors, people may be able to space themselves out. Ideally, there would be about six feet between a well person and a sick person. Again, as much as possible, people who are sick should avoid sharing a tent with those who do not have symptoms of respiratory illness (like coughing).

If space is constrained, then the guidance that the Oregon Health Authority has provided regarding shelters and other congregate spaces can be helpful:

- Create a six-foot buffer to separate those who have symptoms of respiratory illness from those who do not.
- Remind people not to share bedding, clothes and other personal items, especially with someone who has those symptoms and has been coughing on their blankets and clothes.
- As much as possible, people who are coughing should try to keep their tissues, bedding, worn clothes and trash separate and contained from refuse produced by other campers.

Pets

This virus may be able to be spread between pets and humans. There have been no cases reported of this yet, however. Our pets are important to us and we are to them. We shouldn't abandon each other because of this concern.

Caring for someone with respiratory symptoms

Many people with COVID-19 can receive the care they need without medical intervention. People are probably most contagious when they have symptoms like cough and fever. Someone who's mildly sick may have the following symptoms: coughing, sneezing, sore throat, a fever and aches. Offer care as if the person has the flu:

- Ensure they rest. And offer non-prescription medicines, like acetaminophen (Tylenol) and ibuprofen (Advil) for symptoms like fever and aches.
- Keep the sick person in a separate, well-ventilated space and apart from other people and pets as much as possible. If that's not possible, keep a distance of at least six feet from people who are well. People who are sick should avoid sharing a tent with people who are well.
- Avoid sharing bedding and clothing if someone's been coughing or sneezing on them.
- A sick person who is coughing or sneezing should wear a mask. If that person cannot wear a mask, then the person caring for them should

wear a mask or cover their nose and mouth when close to the ill person (within 6 feet).

When to seek additional medical care

Testing for COVID-19 remains limited and has primarily been reserved for people who are already in hospitals with serious respiratory symptoms. Generally, someone should seek care for their symptoms only when they're seriously sick, and through the usual means they would access medical care.

Someone should get medical help right away if they develop some of the following symptoms: difficulty breathing, pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen, or if they're unable to drink or keep liquids down.

An ambulance will come like usual when someone calls 911. The paramedics will be wearing extra masks and coverings to keep themselves healthy so they can keep working.

If someone knows someone who needs medical care but won't seek it, they should urge them to do so — ask them to wear a mask and help them stay at least 6 feet away from others.

Guidance for caregivers

The risk of catching a virus from a sick person is highest for their direct caretaker. But others who share space with a sick person should also take the same precautions to limit risk. First, folks should check their own health regularly, as best they can, to watch for the development of similar symptoms.

Caretakers and close contacts should always follow guidance around hand-washing and sanitizer, and touching their faces — particularly after sharing space with the ill person and handling their belongings.

Properly clean all frequently touched surfaces on a regular basis, using everyday cleaning products.

Avoid sharing personal items, utensils, towels or bedding with an ill person.

If laundry access is available or is being provided, items from a sick person and someone who's not showing symptoms can be shared. But to avoid germs, folks should avoid shaking dirty laundry or "hugging" dirty laundry to their chests to carry it.

What we are doing to help

We know that people are concerned about this illness. We want to support members of our community who are unhoused and those who are caring for them. State agencies are working together to meet the needs of these individuals:

- The Oregon Health Authority is participating on a multi-agency taskforce in partnership with the Oregon Office of Emergency Management and the Department of Human Services.
- OHA has developed a framework to anticipate and address the needs of vulnerable populations, including folks living without shelter. We will continue to work with service providers, members of the community and local public health authorities to identify concerns.
- OHA has a team of community engagement liaisons working actively with organizations that represent and serve historically underserved populations, including people living without shelter. This team is holding weekly update calls and developing health messaging and other resources to support health in these communities.