December 17, 2020

Recommendations for Homeless Camps

Basics about how COVID-19 is spread

COVID-19 has symptoms similar to the flu. Symptoms include, but are not limited to, fevers, coughs and shortness of breath. The virus spreads from person to person mainly through respiratory droplets an infected person makes when they cough, sneeze or talk. Droplets can land in mouths or noses of people who are nearby – within about 6 feet. If a healthy 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 healthy person when they touch their own mouth or nose.

Most people recover without medical intervention and have mild symptoms. But certain people have a higher risk of developing more severe symptoms, including pneumonia. Those folks at higher risk tend to be older, have weakened immune systems or have underlying medical conditions (e.g., heart or lung diseases). COVID-19 is new, but there are ways to limit its spread and support those who get sick.

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 healthy, taking these steps will help them not pick up germs from things they touch and spread those germs to their mouth, nose or eyes.

- Folks should do what they can to avoid touching their noses, eyes and mouths.

- Cover coughs: any cough should be covered 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, such as cigarettes, food, phones and utensils.

Hygiene and cleaning

When possible, use disinfectant wipes that say “kills human coronavirus” on the back. Follow the instructions on the label. Do 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.
**Face coverings**

People who are sick and coughing should have access to, and wear, cloth face coverings (or surgical masks if available). Face coverings will help contain droplets that can spread the novel coronavirus. Outreach workers should identify those who have a new, worse or different cough. The face covering or masks they wear will contain secretions or droplets.

Anyone who comes less than 6 feet from someone else, whether they are sick or not, should also wear a face covering. Masks and face coverings are only effective when they are used properly. The following rules must be followed for correct mask use:

- The face covering should fit snugly over the face and cover your nose and mouth.
- The colored side of the mask faces outwards.
- The strings or elastic bands are positioned properly to keep the mask firmly in place.
- The metallic strip is molded to the bridge of your nose. Watch this video [here](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9VbojLOQe94) 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. They should:

- Practice good hand hygiene on a regular basis, including before and after interactions with other people.
- Keep at least 6 feet away from other people.
- Avoid handling client belongings (unless they are wearing gloves).

**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 (e.g., coughing, fever, shortness of breath) from those without. This will stop the sick person’s respiratory droplets from getting into a healthy person’s mouth or nose through the air. This is helpful even if coughing people are wearing masks, and it’s especially important if there are no masks. If outdoors, people may be able to space themselves out. Ideally, there would be at least six feet between a healthy 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 (e.g., coughing, fever, shortness of breath).

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

- Create at least a 6-foot distance between tents (ideally further apart if space allows) to separate those who have symptoms of respiratory illness from those who do not.
- Avoid crowding around food, water and sanitation stations.
- Wear masks or face coverings when around other people. Masks should not be placed on young children under the age of 2, anyone who has trouble breathing, or anyone who is unconscious or is otherwise unable to care for themselves and take their mask off by themselves.
- Remind people not to share bedding, clothes and other personal items, especially with someone who has 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. Our pets are important to us and we are important 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 can be contagious in the two days before they have symptoms like cough and fever. Someone who is 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 6 feet from people who are healthy. People who are sick should avoid sharing a tent with people who are healthy.
- Avoid sharing bedding and clothing if someone has 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
Someone should seek medical care through the same provider they normally would if they experience any symptoms of COVID-19, which include:

- Fever or chills
- Cough
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Fatigue
- Muscle or body aches
- Headache
- New loss of smell or taste
- Sore throat
- Congestion or runny nose
- Nausea or vomiting
- Diarrhea

Someone should get medical help right away if they develop any of the following symptoms:

- Difficulty breathing
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Inability to drink or keep liquids down
- Newly developed confusion
• Inability to stay awake

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 refuses to seek it out, 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 direct caretakers. However, others who share space with a sick person should also take the same precautions to limit risk. 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 sanitizing, and avoid 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 with everyday cleaning products.

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

If laundry access is available, items from a sick person and someone who is not showing symptoms can be shared. To avoid germs, folks should avoid shaking dirty laundry or “hugging” dirty laundry to their chests to carry it.

**Guidance for Encampments**

OHA recommends that if individual housing options are not available (or if people don’t want to go to other housing), people who are living unsheltered or in camps should be allowed to remain where they are. Clearing camps can cause people to mix with more people in the community and break connections with service providers. This increases the potential for the spread of infectious disease.

**What we are doing to help**

We know that people are concerned about COVID-19. We want to support members of our community who are unhoused and those who are caring for them.

Additionally, state agencies are working together to meet the needs of these individuals in the following ways:

• OHA 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, which includes 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 actively working 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 well-being in these communities.

**Resources**

**Interim Guidance on Unsheltered Homelessness and COVID-19 for Homeless Service Providers and Local Officials**

**Local Public Health Authority Directory**

**Document accessibility:** For individuals with disabilities or individuals who speak a language other than English, OHA can provide information in alternate formats such as translations, large print, or braille. Contact the Health Information Center at 1-971-673-2411, 711 TTY or COVID19.LanguageAccess@dhsoha.state.or.us