

BC Housing is working with the Province of BC, BC's health authorities, the BC Centre for Disease Control, the Public Health Agency of Canada, and other partners to monitor COVID-19 (Coronavirus). We recognize that many of the people our housing providers serve have higher rates of health concerns and may be at greater risk if exposed to the virus.

The information in this bulletin is primarily intended for those housing providers whose tenants have the ability to self-isolate. We will work with our health partners to provide updated information regarding COVID-19 as the situation evolves in a timely and accessible manner.

PROVINCIAL UPDATE

We know this is a difficult time for many housing and homelessness providers. Our top priority is supporting our employees and tenants, and those of our partners in the community housing sector. We are here to help you, including with cost pressures.

We also recognize the unique challenges facing many homelessness service providers – especially shelters and transition houses – in preventing the spread of COVID-19 due to the building environment and communal living where people are living and eating together. We are working with health authorities and municipalities to plan how to support those homelessness service providers who have limited or no space to help isolate those who may have been exposed to the virus.

Check out the [COVID-19 Update](#) to learn more about what BC Housing is doing to respond. [Information Resources](#)

Information Resources

Monitor BC Housing COVID-19 page for updates, including contingency resources in case of outbreak <https://www.bchousing.org/COVID-19>, and please visit the [BC Government Public Health Alerts](#) web page to access the latest updates on COVID-19 and the [Canada.ca/coronavirus website](https://www.canada.ca/en/departement-finance/economic-response-plan.html) for updates which include financial supports: <https://www.canada.ca/en/departement-finance/economic-response-plan.html>.

COVID-19 Testing Criteria – Updated as of March 17th

Testing is available for all who need it, but not everyone requires a test. The following people do NOT need to be tested:

- People with mild or no symptoms;
- Returning travelers who are self-isolating at home.

The Ministry of Health is strongly urging anyone who has symptoms – including fever, cough, sneezing, sore throat or difficulty breathing – *self isolate for 14 days*. If you have tenants requiring self-isolation, please:

- Advise BC Housing of the situation;
- Learn more on supporting tenants who require self-isolation in ACT section (p.6).

People Who Require Testing

People who require testing are those with respiratory symptoms, who are:

- Hospitalized or likely to be hospitalized;



- Health care workers;
- Residents of long term care facilities;
- Part of an investigation of a cluster or outbreak.

If someone requires emergency medical assistance, please contact 9-1-1.

More information

- [BC COVID-19 Online Self-Assessment Tool](#)
- [BC Centre for Disease Control](#) for updated guidelines on testing and isolation criteria.

If you Suspect an Outbreak

Please contact BC Housing and your local public health authority to discuss the situation and develop a response plan.

Information on COVID-19 – NEW as of March 17th

The province has created a phone service to provide **non-medical** information about COVID-19, including the latest information on social distancing. Information is available in 110 languages, 7:30 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. at **1-888-COVID19 (1-888-268-4319)** or via text message at **604-630-0300**.

PREPARE

The following have been developed to provide practical steps to help your organization prepare.

Have a Response Plan

- Monitor your local health authority website for updates on COVID-19.
- Identify a plan for employees who might have a higher risk due to complex health conditions. Employees and/or volunteers at high risk for COVID-19 (i.e., seniors and those with underlying health conditions) should not be caring for tenants who may be sick.
- Report suspected COVID-19 cases to your BC Housing representative.
- Develop a mitigation plan to help minimize the potential risk to employees. For example:
 - Use physical barriers to protect employees who will have interactions with tenants with unknown infection status (e.g., check-in staff).
 - Install a sneeze guard at the check-in desk or place an additional table between employees and tenants to increase the distance between them.
 - If employees are handling tenants belongings, they should use disposable gloves.
 - Any tenant with a cough or sneeze who is being transported in a car must be provided with – and wear – a mask or use a tissue to contain any particles.
- Plan to have extra supplies on hand in the event of a COVID-19 outbreak, including:
 - Soap
 - Alcohol-based hand sanitizers for employees who have no access to soap and water
 - Tissues
 - Disinfecting wipes

Learn more at BCHousing.org/COVID-19

- Trash baskets
- Gloves
- Disposable masks to use *for people who are sick*
- Paper plates, disposable cups and utensils

We recognize the challenges that many service providers are having in accessing supplies. Please notify your BC Housing regional representative if you are having difficulty finding supplies.

For More Information

- [Information for Patients with Chronic Health Conditions](#) (BC Centre for Disease Control)
- [VCH Pandemic Response Planning Checklist for Homeless & Housing Service Providers](#)
- [CDC Interim Guidelines for Homeless Shelters](#)
- [WHO Formula for DIY Hand Sanitizer](#)

Promote Prevention Practices

- Encourage proper hand washing with soap and water. Post [hand washing](#) signage in the common areas.
- Encourage employees to use hand sanitizer when a sink and soap are unavailable.
- Follow good respiratory etiquette. Post [cough etiquette](#) and [STOP 2019 Novel Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) poster](#) in common areas.
- Encourage employees to stay home if they are sick. If they have symptoms like coughing, shortness of breath, fever or sore throat, encourage them to call their primary care provider, local public health office or call 1-888- COVID19 (1-888-268-4319).
- [Post signs](#) at entrances instructing visitors not to visit if they have symptoms of respiratory infection.

Plan for Employee Shortages

If you have not already developed plans for employee shortages, now is the time to consider the following:

- Develop clear guidelines for when employees and volunteers are expected to stay home and when they can return to work. Staff (and volunteers) may need to stay home when they are sick, caring for a sick household member, or caring for their children in the event of school/daycare dismissals. Employees should not be asked to provide medical notes during this time.
- Identify critical job functions and positions, and where possible plan for alternative coverage by cross-trained staff members.
- Implement a training plan for your employees on COVID-19 and risk prevention measures. This may help address employee concerns and help avoid additional employee shortages due to fear of exposure.

Communicate, Communicate, Communicate

Communicate with employees and tenants on prevention instructions and public health updates:

- Describe what actions you are taking to protect them.
- Answer questions and explain what they can do to protect themselves, fellow tenants and employees.

PREVENT – STOP THE SPREAD

The primary focus is to prevent the introduction of COVID-19 and its spread throughout the building. The following operational considerations are designed to help minimize the spread of COVID-19.

The [BC Centre for Disease Control](#) (BCCDC) website is a good resource for information on the symptoms of COVID-19 and how the virus is spread. For **non-medical** information, please call **1-888- COVID19 (1-888-268-4319)** or via text message at **604-630-0300**.

Monitor

- Designate someone to monitor tenant, employees and visitors for symptoms: fever, cough, difficulty breathing.

Screening and Intake Procedures

- **For those buildings that may have visitors**
 - Post signs at entrances instructing visitors not to visit if they have symptoms of respiratory infection. BC Housing has created the following posters:
 - [COVID-19 Notice for Visitors](#)– Please don't visit tenants if you have the following symptoms.
 - [COVID-19 No Visitors Allowed](#) - No visitors except health and essential services.
 - Consider restricting visitors to essential personnel only, which should include health care staff (pharmacists, home support workers, ACT Teams, etc.).
 - If someone is showing symptoms of COVID-19 when they arrive, such as coughing, shortness of breath, fever or sore throat:
 - Ask them to wear a mask or use a tissue (if a mask is not available) to prevent transmission to other people.
 - Try to keep them separated from other tenants by six feet (approximately 2 metres).
 - Call the local public health office or call 1-888- COVID19 (1-888-268-4319).
- **Implement hand washing protocols**
 - Remind people to wash their hands when:
 - They arrive and before they leave.
 - Before and after they work with a client.
 - Before and after eating, etc.

Social Distancing Recommendations

- **Meals**
 - For those programs that offer shared meals, eliminate buffet-style eating.
 - Consider temporarily close dining rooms and communal eating spaces. Create temporary closure and protocol signage.
 - Consider using paper plates, disposable cups and utensils.
 - Consider closing dining rooms and delivering meals to tenants' rooms.
 - If it's not possible to shut down communal dining spaces, consider staggering mealtimes or providing one full meal and meal supplements (bars, Ensure, sandwiches) that tenants can take away, so tenants don't travel to multiple agencies to eat.
 - Discuss arrangements with your kitchen and/or food supplier to package individual meals.
 - Run dishwashers at the highest temperature settings.
- **Educate tenants about what they can do to help prevent the spread**
 - Ask tenants to increase distance and refrain from touching, kissing, hugging, handshaking.
 - Encourage hand washing and proper cough etiquette.
 - For single parent households, talk to tenants about identifying a temporary caregiver for their children if they get sick.
 - Talk to [children about the virus and precautions](#) they can take.
 - Support tenants with [managing stress and keeping calm](#)

Minimize unnecessary gatherings – Updated March 17th

- Limit gatherings to only those that are critical in nature and where social distance is possible (under five people in a large, well-ventilated space).

Entering Suites

- For those providers who do wellness checks:
 - Minimize entry into client suites unless it is an emergency.
 - Wellness checks can still be done, but employees should stay in hallway.
 - Employees should wash their hands before and after visiting a suite to prevent the spread of viruses in order to protect the residents.

Transporting Tenants

- Ask tenants who may have a cough or sneeze to wear a mask when transporting them to appointments.

ENHANCED CLEANING PROTOCOLS

To minimize the risk of spreading the virus, we recommend prioritizing enhanced cleaning and disinfecting of common areas where people gather and high touchpoints (i.e., elevators, common amenity spaces, door handles, countertops, and bathroom surfaces) a minimum of three or more times a day. Cleaning floors, walls, and windows should be secondary at this time.

- To properly disinfect the common areas, follow the product directions. For most products, the proper procedure is to first clean the area with soap and water, then apply the disinfectant and let it sit in place for about 10 minutes before wiping it with a clean cloth. This is in addition to regular cleaning, which must continue to take place.
- For disinfection, any of the following should be effective:
 - Most common EPA-registered household disinfectants
 - Alcohol solutions with at least 70% alcohol
 - Diluted household bleach solution

More information on disinfectant products effective against COVID-19 is available on page 9 of the [2019 Novel Coronavirus: BC Public Health Guidelines for Schools and Child Care Programs](#).

Helpful tips:

- Follow any manufacturing instructions for the application and proper ventilation.
- Remember to check the product is not past its expiry date.
- Never mix household bleach with ammonia or any other cleanser.
- Unexpired household bleach will be effective against coronaviruses when properly diluted.

ACT – SUPPORT PEOPLE WHO MIGHT HAVE COVID-19

Some people with chronic health conditions have a higher risk of becoming severely ill if they have COVID-19. Additionally, elderly tenants also have a higher risk of becoming severely ill if they have COVID-19.

The Ministry of Health is strongly urging anyone who has symptoms – including fever, cough, sneezing, sore throat or difficulty breathing – *self isolate for 14 days*. If you have tenant who is displaying symptoms, please:

- Ask the person to wear a mask to prevent transmission to other people; if a mask is not available, provide tissues for them to cover their mouth and nose.
- Ask the person to wash their hands with either:
 - Liquid soap and running water, and dry with paper towels; or
 - Alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Ask them to [self-isolate](#).
- Advise your BC Housing representative.
- If the client is in distress, call 9-1-1. Signs of distress include:
 - Shortness of breath, rapid breathing, or difficulty catching breath.
 - New/worsening chest pain.
 - Cyanosis (bluish discoloration of skin) or general blue discoloration.

Learn more at [BCHousing.org/COVID-19](https://www.bchousing.org/COVID-19)



Check out [BC COVID-19 Online Self-Assessment Tool](#) to determine if tenants require further assessment.

Management of Tenants with Suspected COVID-19

If tenants with suspected COVID-19 are in distress, call 9-1-1. For tenants with suspected COVID-19 and **are not in distress** consider the following.

- Ask the tenant to follow the [directions for self-isolation](#).
- If they have to leave their home, ask them to wear a mask.
- Ask them to wash their hands before and after eating.
- Consider whether to increase cleaning of commonly-touched surfaces in the building.
- The health care provider may also advise on other steps that may help in the person’s recovery from COVID-19.

MORE INFORMATION

Provincial / Federal	Local Health Authorities	BC Housing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BC Centre for Disease Control • HealthLink BC • Public Health Agency of Canada • Canada.ca/coronavirus website • Canada’s COVID-19 Economic Response Plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vancouver Coastal Health • Fraser Health • Interior Health • Island Health • Northern Health 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BC Housing COVID-19 • General inquires can be directed to communityrelations@bchousing.org

Key Contacts

Please contact your Non-Profit Property Manager from BC Housing or Aboriginal Housing Management Association (AMHA) if you have any questions related to responding COVID-19.