

February 7, 2023

Dear King County Homeless Service Partners,

This letter outlines recommendations for preventing the spread of COVID-19 at homeless service sites in King County. King County's community level, which is determined by looking at hospital beds being used for COVID-19, hospital admissions related to COVID-19, and the total number of new COVID-19 cases in an area, can be monitored on [Public Health Data Dashboards](#). Homeless service sites are encouraged to take actions to stock up on supplies in case of future surges to ensure adequate volumes of personal protective equipment (PPE) including [high quality masks and respirators](#), and other supplies such as test kits and cleaning products. Additionally, sites should focus on efforts such as encouraging vaccination among staff and guests, making improvements to indoor air quality, and developing staffing plans for continuity of essential operations in the case of increased community transmission. Please report COVID-19 cases and request technical assistance using our [COVID-19 intake survey](#).

Masks

King County's local indoor mask order ended concurrently with the state's order after March 11, 2022. This policy change does not mean COVID-19 is over. Masking is still a critically important public health tool to prevent spread of COVID-19. The [CDC recommends](#) universal masking regardless of vaccination status when COVID-19 Community Levels are high, any time there has been transmission within the facility, or based on facility or individual risk factors for severe illness. [Washington Department of Health](#) (DOH) recommends universal masking when COVID-19 Community Levels are medium or high. CDC [recommends strategies](#) for choosing high-quality, well-fitting masks.

Masks should continue to be worn:

- When someone has symptoms of COVID-19
- When someone has tested positive for COVID-19
- When someone has been exposed to someone with COVID-19
- When required by L&I (consult [WA State Department of Labor & Industries COVID-19 page](#))
- When required by [state or federal law](#)
- When advised by Public Health in an ongoing facility outbreak

Businesses and organizations may choose to implement their own mask requirements at their facilities. Additional masking guidance in King County is located on our [Masking Guidance](#) webpage.

Isolation & Quarantine

Isolation is used to separate people with confirmed or suspected COVID-19 from those without COVID-19. The CDC and DOH recommend that people staying or working in non-healthcare congregate settings isolate 10 days after symptom onset, or after test date if the individual does not have symptoms. A 10 day isolation is recommended for staff and clients regardless of vaccination and booster status. Isolation may be shortened to 7 days if the individual has a negative viral test, symptoms are improving and has been fever-free for 24 hours, the individual was not hospitalized and the individual does not have a weakened immune system.

Quarantine is used to separate or restrict the movement of people who were exposed to COVID-19 to prevent further transmission in case they become sick. Quarantine is no longer universally recommended. Your decision to utilize quarantine may consider the health of staff and resident population, mental health impact of quarantine, staffing capacity, and severity of transmission at your facility. Use of well-fitting masks, symptom monitoring and COVID-19 testing all help mitigate the increased risk of removing quarantine. King County's Isolation and Quarantine (IQ) system will continue operation through 2023 and will continue to accept individuals for both isolation and quarantine. The model of Isolation and Quarantine service delivery has changed to utilize two Adult Family Homes, a motel and hotel vouchers. Information about I&Q support services can be found at [COVID-19 homelessness response isolation and quarantine services - King County](#). Anyone can request Isolation and Quarantine services through their direct line: 206-848-0710.

All organizations should have a well-defined plan for sheltering COVID-19 positive and/or exposed individuals in place should a surge or other delay in accessing IQ services occur. PHSKC has created guidance for [Supporting COVID-19 Positive and Symptomatic Guests within Congregate Shelters](#). All organizations are encouraged to establish a contract with a hotel broker and to plan for utilization of hotel vouchers. Staffing to support, feed, and care for clients using a hotel voucher is the responsibility of the shelter provider.

Testing

Testing for COVID-19 is an important outbreak prevention measure at homeless service sites.

Mobile testing: Mobile testing remains available on a limited basis through Public Health – Seattle & King County's Health Care for the Homeless (HCHN) mobile team for facility-wide testing at homeless service sites if a) someone has tested positive and was on site while infectious, or b) if 2 or more individuals are experiencing COVID-like illness and have not been tested. This service is limited, and capacity for follow up may decrease for each site as demand increases.

Homeless Service Site Run Testing (Point of Care): We encourage all homeless service organizations to become a COVID-19 testing site for their own residents using rapid tests. Rapid COVID-10 tests provide results within minutes of the test being administered and can be utilized on-site without the need for healthcare staff. PHSKC is providing facilities which have a CLIA waiver with rapid antigen test kits for both screening and diagnostic testing to prevent future outbreaks and respond to ongoing outbreaks. If your organization is interested in becoming a point-of-care testing facility, PHSKC has developed instructional materials below (a checklist, a 20-minute training video and presentation slides) to support your organization with understanding the regulatory and reporting requirements of this program, including applying for a CLIA waiver.

- [Point-of-Care COVID-19 Testing Checklist for Homeless Service Providers](#)
- [Point-of-Care COVID-19 Testing: Steps to Becoming a Point-of-Care Site for Homeless Service Providers video \(20 minutes\)](#)
- [Point-of-Care Antigen Testing for Homeless Service Providers - video slide deck](#)

Over-the-counter test kit distribution program: For facilities that are not point-of-care testing sites (i.e. have not applied for a CLIA waiver), King County's [over-the-counter test kit distribution program](#) has ended as of March 11, 2022. Organizations should continue to distribute test kits until your supply is gone.

King County free testing sites: Free testing sites in King County are open to anyone regardless of immigration or insurance status. You can find [COVID-19 testing locations and guidance](#) on our website.

COVID-19 Vaccination

COVID-19 vaccines maximize your protection against COVID-19. Being “up-to-date” with COVID-19 vaccines (including getting a booster shot when you are eligible) provides the most protection against severe illness, hospitalization, and death.

Locations to get a COVID-19 vaccination are listed on our [PHSKC Getting Vaccinated in King County](#) webpage.

Health Care for the Homeless (HCHN) will continue to run mobile vaccination clinics in 2023 on a limited basis. Please email CHS.HEART@kingcounty.gov if you would like to have a team hold a vaccination clinic at your site. The team can also provide information about COVID-19 and consult with staff about how to engage, support, and open dialogue with anyone who may still feel ambivalent about vaccination.

Other mitigation measures for preventing the spread of COVID-19

COVID-19 is an airborne virus and can spread easily indoors, especially in crowded spaces. All organizations with indoor facilities should ensure good air ventilation and filtration through the use of HVAC systems, portable HEPA air cleaners, and keeping windows open when health and safety permits. Guidance for improving indoor air quality can be found on our Public Health – Seattle & King County [Improving Indoor Air](#) webpage. CDC’s guidance for homeless service providers also includes a section on [facility ventilation considerations](#).

Public Health – Seattle & King County’s Environmental Health team can provide your facility with ventilation and air quality technical assistance. Information for requesting technical assistance can be found on the [Improving Indoor Air Quality webpage](#).

If your facility acquired portable HEPA air cleaners in the past and you have questions about their proper use or when to replace filters, please reach out to the HEART team at CHS.HEART@kingcounty.gov so we may assist.

People should continue to follow prevention measures in homeless service sites such as cleaning high touch surfaces and physical distancing, even if they are “up-to-date” on vaccination. HEART can also provide resources and information, and printed copies of our [Safer Cleaning, Sanitizing, and Disinfecting Guide](#), and our [Sanitation and Hygiene Guide](#), which include reference sheets and laminated signs.

Guidance for non-health care businesses and organizations during COVID-19

All businesses are required to follow [Washington State L&I Requirements](#) for preventing COVID-19 (updated March 12, 2022). More information can be found on the L&I COVID-19 [web page here](#).

Guidance for Mpox (Monkeypox)

Mpox is a disease which can cause flu-like symptoms and a rash, and may be transmitted through direct contact with lesions and/or infected body and respiratory fluids. Please reference CDC’s guidance for

[Preventing Monkeypox Spread in Congregate Settings](#) and for [Reducing Stigma in Monkeypox Communication](#). While cases have been consistently dropping since August, 2022, we recommend sites be aware of the possibility of infections occurring within your facility. We recommend anyone with symptoms or possible exposure visit the [Harborview Sexual Health Clinic](#). If a staff or resident at your facility tests positive for Mpox, please report it to Public Health – Seattle & King County at (206) 296-4774.

Guidance for non-COVID-19 Respiratory Illness

Influenza (flu), RSV and other respiratory illnesses are anticipated to continue spreading in the 2022/2023 season. Fortunately, all of the mitigation strategies for COVID-19 are also effective at reducing transmission of these infections. This highlights the importance of wearing well-fitting masks when indoors and distancing when possible. Getting vaccinated for flu is also of particular importance. If you have multiple cases of an illness which is not COVID-19, please report it to Public Health – Seattle & King County at (206) 296-4774.

Stay Informed

We encourage your organization to attend our Wednesday afternoon COVID-19 Homeless Service Provider calls ([Zoom registration link here](#)). This call includes updates and information regarding COVID-19, addresses questions from the community and provides an opportunity for Public Health to hear questions and feedback from homeless service providers.

Bookmark and review these key resources to refer back to:

CDC: [Guidance on Management of COVID-19 in Homeless Service Sites and in Correctional and Detention Facilities | CDC](#)

DOH: [What to do if you test positive for COVID-19 \(wa.gov\)](#) and [What to do if you were potentially exposed to someone with COVID-19 \(wa.gov\)](#)

PHSKC: [COVID-19 homelessness response - King County](#)

As always, please reach out with any questions or concerns.

- The Public Health COVID-19 Call Center will be functioning as a phone tree until March 31, 2023 and can be called at (206) 477-3977.
- Isolation and Quarantine referrals can be made at 206-848-0710 between 8:00am and 6:30pm, 7 days a week.
- Please report COVID-19 cases and request technical assistance using our [COVID-19 intake survey](#) on our [COVID-19 homelessness response page](#), or by calling our Communicable Disease and Epidemiology main line at 206-296-4774.

With appreciation,

Public Health – Seattle & King County