



## COVID-19 Screening and Testing Protocol for Congregate Shelters

Last Updated: 3/18/2020

### Protocol Overview:

In order to maintain a safe environment for clients and staff, congregate shelter staff will screen clients staying at or entering the shelter for risk of COVID -19, also known as the Coronavirus. If clients are deemed to be at risk of having COVID-19 after initial screening, shelter staff will arrange for those clients to get appropriate care based on guidance from the DC Department of Health (DC Health). The purpose of this document is to provide instructions for shelter staff on how to enact this policy.

*Note: Clients should be encouraged to remain in the shelter or on shelter premises to the maximum extent possible. Clients will retain shelter assignments during the COVID-19 and will not move from shelter to shelter during the pandemic to minimize contact with other people to the maximum extent possible.*

This screening protocol is a NON-MEDICAL screening, meaning staff are not being asked to do a medical evaluation, such as take a client's temperature.

Shelter staff should also try to keep clients assigned to the same bed, except where this protocol recommends relocating clients who have non-COVID health conditions or other vulnerabilities to a designated space within the shelter.

### Who does this protocol apply to?

This policy applies to all congregate emergency shelter facilities for individuals experiencing homelessness. A congregate emergency shelter is a facility where a number of people reside in close proximity to one another. Multiple people sleep in the same room (often in bunk beds), bathroom facilities are shared, and meals are provided cafeteria- style.

### Who should be screened?

- Everyone currently in the shelter (staff should use the bed list as guidance)
- Everyone entering shelter (if they are new to the shelter or have left the premises and are returning). This includes – but is not limited to – clients, vendors, visitors, and staff.

### Where should screening occur?

At intake (for new clients):

Shelter staff should conduct screening of clients seeking to enter the shelter outdoors before the client goes inside. The staff asking the screening questions



should follow CDC social distancing guidelines and try to remain six feet away from the client (known as “social distancing”) while asking screening questions.

*Note: To the extent possible, clients lining up to enter shelters should also be encouraged to follow social distancing guidelines and remain approximately six feet apart from one another. Given that shelters have transitioned to 24 hours, there should not be the need for large numbers of shelter guests to line up at the same time.*

#### In shelter (for existing clients):

Shelter staff should use discretion on how to set up a process for screening clients currently in the shelter. Shelter staff doing the screening and clients waiting to be screened should practice social distancing to the extent possible following CDC guidance. Options may include setting appointment times and using cafeteria space to conduct screenings at different tables.

#### **How often should screening occur?**

All clients entering the shelter for the first time or after leaving the premises and returning should be screened before entering the shelter.

Screening of clients remaining on the premises should happen every seven days OR if a client newly exhibits or expresses they have symptoms (e.g. coughing, fever, shortness of breath).

#### **What are the screening questions?**

Please see the attached script. The screening will determine whether a client is at high risk of having COVID-19.

#### **What happens if someone is determined to be at high risk of having COVID-19 after screening?**

Shelter staff should first determine if the person has sought medical care for known COVID-19 symptoms (fever, cough, shortness of breath) the past 14 days and whether they received instructions to remain isolated or to “self-quarantine.”

Anyone who has been asked to self-isolate or self-quarantine by a medical provider while COVID-19 test results are pending will be transported to a temporary quarantine location. Shelter staff should call the FEMS Operations Center at 202-373-3712 to arrange transportation to the temporary quarantine location. When staff make the call, staff should indicate that it is a transfer request.



If the client has not sought medical care, shelter staff should connect the person to medical care. If medical care is needed after 10pm, call 911 to arrange transportation to the hospital for medical care.

### **What happens if someone refuses to answer screening questions?**

If they are not showing symptoms, allow the person into shelter with additional guidance on proper hygiene and sanitation protocols according to current [CDC protocols](#).

If they are showing symptoms [persistent cough, signs of fever, chills, and shortness of breath], the client should not be allowed to enter the shelter. In the absence of on-site medical care (i.e. Unity), staff should call 911 and seek medical care for that client showing symptoms.

### **What happens if someone is waiting for COVID-19 test results?**

Clients that have been tested for COVID-19 and are awaiting test results will be transported from the medical facility to a temporary quarantine location to be arranged by DHS until negative status is confirmed.

In the event that a client presents at a shelter and states they have been tested and are waiting for results, shelter staff should contact FEMS Operations Center at 202-373-3712 to arrange transportation.

### **What happens if someone receives a positive test result for COVID-19?**

Clients that test positive for COVID-19 will be transported to a temporary location where the District is providing isolated quarantine. They can be monitored and receive medical attention as needed. DC Health will contact the shelter provider and DHS with further instructions if a client staying in shelter, or served by a homeless services provider (meal, day program etc..) tests positive for COVID-19.

### **Are all people with COVID-19 symptoms and experiencing homelessness being sent to a separate homeless shelter?**

No – people who are waiting for test results for COVID-19 and have symptoms will be provided with a place where they can isolate themselves while their test results are pending. In most cases this should take up to 48 hours, but could take several days. If clients are presenting with symptoms and refusing medical care, they will be sent to an alternate shelter location to mitigate any risk they may pose to other clients and staff.

### **Where can I turn if I have additional questions?**

For questions or additional information, please email [dhs.covid19@dc.gov](mailto:dhs.covid19@dc.gov).



## DHS Congregate Shelter Screening Tool

**Instructions:** The questions in **BOLD** are the questions shelter staff should ask the client. The items in *ITALICS* are follow up actions to take.

### **Screening Script:**

**“Hi, for your safety and protection, we are taking extra precautions around the outbreak of the coronavirus, also called COVID 19. I need to ask you a couple of questions. It should only take a few minutes.”**

1. Are you currently experiencing cough, fever, and shortness of breath?
  - a. *If no → Allow the person into the shelter or stay in shelter.*
  - b. *If yes → CONTINUE SCREENING. Proceed to question #2*
  
2. Have you seen a doctor or gotten treatment for these symptoms in the past 14 days?
  - a. *If no → ASK: “Can we connect you with a healthcare professional to seek treatment for your symptoms? We want to take every precaution to keep you safe.”*
    - i. *If yes → Call the FEMS operations center at 202-373-3712 to arrange transport to a healthcare professional. If after 10pm, call 911 to arrange transport to the emergency room for a health evaluation.*
    - ii. *If no → call 911 or connect to on-site medical services and say: “For the safety of other clients, we are not able to allow you into the shelter.”*
  - b. *If yes → CONTINUE SCREENING. Proceed to question #3.*
  
3. **“Did the doctor or health care facility test you for COVID-19 and give you any guidance that you should stay isolated or “self-quarantine”? Did they give you any paperwork that you can share with me?”**
  - a. *If yes → say: “For people who have been asked to isolate, we have a safe, alternate place for you to stay for the next 14 days. We will arrange transportation for you to the site. Someone will meet you at the site to give you more information.”*
    1. *Call the FEMS Operations Center at 202-373-3712 to arrange transportation.*
  - b. *If no → allow into the shelter.*