

COVID-19 Guidance for Operators of Shelters, Group Homes, Independent and Supportive Living

This resource is intended to provide guidance to facility operators who are experiencing positive cases of COVID-19 in staff and/or residents. See the B.C. Centre for Disease Control's (BCCDC) website [COVID-19 \(bccdc.ca\)](https://www.bccdc.ca) for the most up-to-date information on COVID-19, including the spread, symptoms and applicable public health measures. Not all parts of this document may apply to your facility. Note: the term client and resident are used interchangeably.

A. COVID-19 Immunization

Strongly encourage clients, staff and volunteers to be immunized. Proof of vaccination is not required for clients to access essential services such as shelters or support homes. Approved COVID-19 vaccines in Canada are safe and effective against COVID-19. Some of the side effects from the approved COVID-19 vaccines are similar to the common symptoms of COVID-19. Individuals experiencing any symptoms of COVID-19 after receiving their immunizations are to continue to use the [BC COVID-19 Self-Assessment Tool \(thrive.health\)](https://www.thrive.health) to determine if testing for COVID-19 is required. Regardless of whether an individual (client, employee, visitor) has received a COVID-19 vaccine(s), they must continue to follow local processes for COVID-19 screening and managing COVID-19 like symptoms. For further information, please see the following resources:

- BCCDC Monitoring vaccine update, safety, and effectiveness [Vaccine Safety \(bccdc.ca\)](https://www.bccdc.ca).
- BCCDC Getting a vaccine [Getting a Vaccine \(bccdc.ca\)](https://www.bccdc.ca).

B. Contact Tracing

Not all positive cases of COVID-19 will be contacted by public health, only those identified in high consequence groups will be contacted. Therefore, if someone at your facility tests positive, they will need to follow the direction provided by the BCCDC: [If You Have COVID-19 \(bccdc.ca\)](https://www.bccdc.ca). Independent living facility operators will only be contacted by public health if we believe there is a reason to investigate a COVID-19 cluster at your facility.

C. Infection Prevention and Control Measures

Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) measures help to create a safe environment for everyone. If you are experiencing cases of COVID-19 at your site, it is recommended that you take additional precautions which may include:

Communication

- Promoting self-monitoring of symptoms amongst clients/residents and staff
- Notifying visitors that the building is experiencing positive cases. If appropriate, you may wish to notify clients and client families as well. Confidentiality of cases must always be maintained.

- Sharing the [Who is testing recommended for.pdf \(bccdc.ca\)](#) by posting in conspicuous locations.
- Encouraging testing for symptomatic individuals. COVID tests can be booked by calling the Northern Health Virtual Clinic at 1-844-645-7811 or online through the [Northern Health COVID-19 Testing Form](#).
- Post [Signage and Posters \(bccdc.ca\)](#) that are appropriate for your facility.

Modifying Activities

- Closing common areas until all cases have completed their self isolation period.
- Providing meals on trays to clients in their rooms. If this is not possible, consider assigned seating and/or multiple seatings, or utilize empty rooms and spaces as temporary dining settings.
- Rescheduling planned events and activities.
- Ensure capacity is reduced to allow for appropriate physical distancing in staff areas including breakrooms, staff offices, and common areas.
- Hold meetings virtually whenever possible.

Staff Cohorting

- Consider assigning designated staff to support COVID-19 positive residents.
- Consider cohorting staff; this means arranging staff into shifts that always work together to minimize their contact with other staff members.
- Where practical, minimize staff movement between different floors or different areas of the facility.

Space Arrangements (shelters only)

- In most cases, BC Housing and Northern Health will work with under housed clients to provide safe isolation sites, this is usually in a local hotel. Depending on the number of cases, this may not always be possible.

If you are isolating positive cases in the shelter, consider the following:

- Individual private rooms are ideal for COVID-19 positive clients. If individual rooms are not available, a COVID-19 isolation area should be set up. If possible, there should be a separate entrance for the isolation area.
- The COVID-19 isolation area needs to be physically separate from the remainder of the shelter. Physical separation can be accomplished with shower curtains, cubicle dividers or other physical separation materials that can be easily cleaned. The physical barrier should be up to the ceiling or at least 2.5 metres tall.
- Under ideal circumstances, beds should be arranged with 2 metre distancing so that clients sleep head-to-toe, instead of head-to-head; however, recognizing the current

space limitations in many shelters, the minimum requirement for head to toe placement of mats, cots and beds is 1 metre in emergency shelters, temporary housing, and short-term and long-term transitional facilities/units while sleeping.

- Areas of congregation should be minimized.
- A separate washroom is ideal if available. If not, then a designated COVID-19 washroom stall that is disinfected after each use if possible.
- Separate shower within the COVID-19 area of the shelter or designated block shower times for positive clients, disinfect shower area after use.
- Separate laundry within the COVID-19 area of the shelter or designated laundry times for the positive clients and disinfect laundry area after each use.
- Food brought to COVID-19 area and/or directly to positive residents' bedroom rather than the shelter's shared meal location/dining area.
- Separate Overdose Prevention Spaces (OPS) onsite if possible. If this is not possible, then try to encourage staggered use to prevent overlap between clients from hot/cold zones and ensure cleaning in between.
- Ensure bathrooms and other sinks are adequately stocked with liquid soap and drying materials for handwashing.

Isolation Protocols

- Prepare a plan where the resident can self-isolate. Use a room away from other residents including a separate washroom when possible. If a separate washroom is not available, organize a bathroom schedule. Clean and disinfect after the resident uses it.
- Advise positive residents to stay in their rooms as much as possible.
- Create designated areas outside for positive residents to get some fresh air.
- When possible, meals should be brought to residents who are isolating and collected by staff to be properly washed and sanitized. If this is not possible, considered staggered meal times for residents.
- Provide COVID-19 positive residents with entertainment during their isolation – TVs, movies, video games, books, coloring books, puzzles and treats (popcorn, candies).
- Incentives should be considered to keep COVID-19 positive clients in isolation. If a COVID-19 positive client leaves the site, encourage them to wear a mask and return as soon as possible to their isolation.

Enhanced Cleaning, Sanitizing, and Disinfecting

- Cleaning and disinfection of all common touch surfaces and common areas at a minimum of twice daily. A disinfectant and/or sanitizer approved by Health Canada to be effective against COVID-19 should be used. See: [List of disinfectants and/or sanitizers with evidence for use against COVID-19 \(Canada.ca\)](#).

- Using disinfectants and/or sanitizers in accordance with manufacturer's instructions including utilizing an appropriate contact time and the use of test strips to ensure appropriate concentration is being used.
- Ensure alcohol based hand sanitizers (min 60% alcohol content) are available and easily accessible throughout the facility to ensure staff and clients have access to hand hygiene.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

- Staff and residents should wear a surgical/ medical mask while in common areas including hallways and elevators. Exercise caution if cloth masks are used. Re-usable cloth masks worn by staff or clients must be washed regularly and need to be made from three layers of fabric. Refer to [proper mask wearing \(bccdc.ca\)](#) for more information.
- Ensure that supplies of PPE are well stocked and adequate should you see a sudden increase of positive cases at your facility. This may include masks, face shields, goggles, and gowns.
- Staff supporting positive individuals should be wearing a medical mask and eye protection at all times.
- Where droplet and contact precautions are needed, ensure staff are trained to wear PPE appropriately, including proper [donning \(bccdc.ca\)](#) and [doffing \(bccdc.ca\)](#) steps.

Airflow/HVAC

A well maintained HVAC system in good working condition ensures that old inside air is replaced with fresh air from the outside at an appropriate frequency and plays a role in reducing the risk of COVID-19 spread throughout a building. Some strategies to improve HVAC systems may include improving the filter's efficiency and optimizing air flow within the building.

- Ensure that the building's HVAC system is regularly maintained by an appropriate professional and that appropriate consultation with professionals should be undertaken before making any changes. You can find some general information about ventilation and air circulation at [ventilation and air circulation \(WorkSafeBC.ca\)](#).
- Free standing (portable) fans should be avoided if possible.
- Windows should be open whenever possible.
- Doors should be propped open if this does not present other risks.

D. Outside of Work Gatherings

Encourage your staff and clients who may leave the site, to minimize their social gatherings and keep their personal gatherings as small as possible, this will minimize the risk of them catching COVID and bringing it into the facility. Information regarding latest restrictions can be found here: [Provincial and regional restrictions - Province of British Columbia \(gov.bc.ca\)](#).