

Guidance for hostel or day centre providers of services for people experiencing homelessness

What you need to know

Background

This guidance will assist staff and employers in addressing coronavirus (COVID-19), in a hostel or day centre environment.

This guidance may be updated in line with the changing situation.

Many people with a history of homelessness have underlying health problems and so likely to be at high risk of complications if they become infected with COVID-19

The infection spreads by droplet from mouth / nose and can remain on hard surfaces for up to 2-3 days.

Infection control measures aim to stop person to person transmission and clean surfaces of contamination

Symptoms

The most common symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) are a new, continuous cough or a high temperature.

For most people, coronavirus (COVID-19) will be a mild infection.

Key points:

- Many day centres and night shelters are closing down due to concerns about the staff safety, staff shortages and clients not being able to effectively [self-isolate](#)
- Current government strategy is to move everyone from the street and to eventually close all winter night shelters
- People who are homeless need to be able to safely self-isolate to reduce transmission risks.
- Local systems must immediately plan to provide multiple venues to cohort [clinically group] and care for homeless people who are COVID-19 positive and to protect people who are COVID-19 negative. This is called the Care and Protect strategy.
- In order to manage people who are COVID-19 positive venues must identify spaces where people can self-isolate, with access to adequate water, food and sanitation.
- Individuals need to know about symptoms of COVID-19 and alert a member of staff as soon as they have symptoms.
- Staff should also become vigilant in spotting individuals with symptoms and screening them regularly.
- Everyone, including people who have no symptoms, should be encouraged to stay 2 metres away from each other (social distancing)
- As soon as testing becomes available, screening will support decision making

In any facility that is supporting clients:

- frequently clean and disinfect objects and surfaces that are touched, using your standard cleaning products. If a surface is not cleaned, the virus can remain potentially infectious for up to 2-3 days.
- if a member of staff becomes unwell on site with a new, continuous cough or a high temperature, they should be sent home and follow guidance on self-isolation.
- if a resident in a hostel becomes unwell:
 - They must avoid all communal and shared facilities on the premises, including bathrooms, kitchens, and living rooms.

- If they have their own room and separate toilet & bathroom, they should be supported to self-isolate in their room. They should avoid communal areas as far as possible. Food / alcohol / methadone may need to be delivered to their rooms.
- If a hostel or supported housing resident cannot avoid sharing a bathroom or kitchen with other residents, providers should work with their local authority and wherever possible the resident should be provided with alternative accommodation where they can self-isolate.
- If someone becomes unwell in a day centre or night shelter, and they do not have a home or room in which to self-isolate, they should be isolated temporarily in as suitable a place as possible. Staff are advised to contact the local authority immediately.
- Local authorities need to support people who are symptomatic to self-isolate.
- Staff and residents should be reminded to wash their hands frequently for 20 seconds.
- Catch coughs and sneezes in tissues, dispose of immediately and wash hands for 20 seconds
- staff will be eligible for statutory sick pay (SSP) when staying at home

What to do if someone develops symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) in a hostel

If a member of staff becomes unwell with a new, continuous cough or a high temperature, they should be sent home and advised to follow the [stay at home guidance](#).

If a resident of the hostel becomes unwell with a new, continuous cough or a high temperature they need to be immediately isolated.

Anyone with a chronic cough and/or who feels otherwise unwell also needs to be triaged, and risk assessed.

If anyone needs clinical advice, they should go online to [NHS 111](#) (or call 111 if they don't have internet access), or ask for advice from a suitably qualified clinician.

In an emergency, call 999 if they are seriously ill or injured or their life is at risk. Do not visit the GP, pharmacy, urgent care centre or a hospital.

If a member of staff has helped someone who was taken unwell with a new, continuous cough or a high temperature, they do not need to go home unless they develop symptoms themselves. They should wash their hands for 20 seconds thoroughly after any contact with someone who is unwell.

Staff should wear appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) when in close contact (<1m) with a resident with symptoms of COVID-19. This is a fluid resistant surgical mask, gloves and disposable plastic apron.

It is not necessary to close either the hostel or the day centre or send any staff home, unless government policy changes. Keep monitoring the website for the latest details.

Use of shared spaces when individuals who live with others in hostels are required to stay in their room

If someone is unwell, they should avoid visiting shared spaces such as kitchens, bathrooms and sitting areas and should not share a bed with another person.

Shared spaces should be kept well ventilated as much as possible.

People should aim to keep at least 2 metres from each other.

If toilet or bathroom facilities are shared, if someone has symptoms, a toilet / bathroom should be identified for their sole use if possible. If this is not possible the bathroom should be cleaned and disinfected using your regular cleaning products, before being used by anyone else.

In addition, if a separate bathroom is not available, consideration should be given to drawing up a rota for washing or bathing, with the person who is unwell using the facilities last, before thoroughly cleaning the bathroom themselves (if they are able or it is appropriate).

A person who is unwell should use separate body and hand towels from other people.

They should not use shared kitchens whilst others are present and the kitchen should be cleaned thoroughly by a member of staff after they use it. Food should be taken to their room wherever possible.

What to do if someone develops symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) in a day centre

Day centres that work with clients who are unable to self-isolate in accordance with this guidance are advised to alert their local authority immediately to this issue.

The Local Authority should be determining how to provide an accommodation response. If someone becomes unwell with a new, continuous cough or a high temperature they should be moved, if possible, to a room where they can be isolated behind a closed door. Ideally, a window should be opened for ventilation. If it is not possible to isolate them then move them to an area which is at least two metres away from other people.

If they need clinical advice, they should go online to [NHS 111](#) or call 111 if they don't have internet access. In an emergency, call 999 if

they are seriously ill or injured or their life is at risk. Do not visit the GP, pharmacy, urgent care centre or a hospital.

If they need to go to the bathroom, they should use a separate bathroom if possible. The bathroom should be cleaned and disinfected using your regular cleaning products before being used by anyone else.

There is no need to close the venue or send staff home if they've been in close contact with a person who has a new, continuous cough or a high temperature unless government policy changes. Keep monitoring the website for the latest details.

Specific considerations for populations living in a hostel or accessing a day centre

There are particular issues for consideration in relation to coronavirus (COVID-19) for people who currently:

- have chronic disease
- have known immune compromise and are vulnerable to infection
- have end of life care issues

Many people who are homeless with a history of rough sleeping have a number of health conditions. People with underlying health conditions have greater vulnerability to the effects of viral infection because of their poor health, especially if they also have drug and alcohol use issues. They will need protecting and supported to self-isolate. This may mean they need to be taken out of the hostel environment to an environment where they can more effectively self-isolate, and be cared for. GPs or homeless health clinicians should be asked for their advice on this.

All concerns for safety should be alerted to the Local Authority.

Members of staff also need to consider contingency plans for situations such as:

- reduced or interrupted supply of medicines, or access to them
- reduced access to or interrupted supply of drugs or alcohol

Responses should include ensuring that sufficient treatment capacity is available if people look for withdrawal support or substitute prescribing as an alternative to using illicit drugs, ie opioid substitution therapy.

This [guidance on clinical management of drug misuse and dependence](#) can be used when considering these contingency plans.

Cleaning and waste

Advice on [cleaning and disinfection of settings which are similar to a healthcare setting](#), is available. There is separate [guidance available for non-healthcare settings](#).

If there has been a confirmed or suspected case in a hostel or day centre, managers may wish to discuss which guidance is most appropriate to their setting with their [local Public Health England Health Protection Team](#).

Laundry

Wash items in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. Use the warmest water setting and dry items completely. Dirty laundry that has been in contact with an unwell person can be washed with other people's items.

Do not shake dirty laundry before it is washed - this minimises the possibility of dispersing the virus through the air.

Clean and disinfect anything used for transporting laundry with your usual products, in line with the cleaning guidance above.

