

Coronavirus & Homelessness

Frequently Asked Questions

Updated: April 16, 2020

How is the County addressing the Coronavirus (COVID-19) with people experiencing homelessness?

The County Health Services Department (CCHS) has been extensively planning with our Public Health and Health, Housing, and Homeless Services (H3) divisions. Here are some of the things we are already doing:

- CCHS Department Operations Center has been activated and is coordinating the public health response efforts across the county.
- CCHS is participating in a Bay Area coronavirus regional coordination effort with our Bay Area regional homeless Continuum of Care (CoC) partners.
- CCHS is working with homeless service providers throughout the county to provide education and resources around COVID-19 and people experiencing homelessness.
- CCHS has identified isolation and quarantine options for people who are experiencing homelessness.
- CCHS is ensuring continuity of homeless services, healthcare, behavioral health services, food pantries and linkages to permanent housing to the greatest extent possible under the county health orders and guidance.
- H3 is hosting regular conference calls with Contra Costa homeless service providers to provide information and updates and answer questions.

What is the County doing to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in homeless shelters?

- Contra Costa Health Services has developed guidance for homeless service providers operating congregate living facilities on how to identify and respond to ill residents.
- Contra Costa County is working to decompress larger shelters that cannot accommodate the physical distancing necessary to reduce the spread of COVID-19 by temporarily moving their clients to hotel rooms.



- Information and education on hand hygiene and cough etiquette is being provided to shelter residents and staff and staff and residents are being provided with masks

What is the County doing for people experiencing homelessness who are not staying in shelters?

- Contra Costa Health Services has developed guidance for street outreach staff who visit encampments, and for individuals living in encampment, vehicles and RVs.
- CORE street outreach teams are distributing hygiene supplies, including hand sanitizer and advice flyers to vehicle and encampment residents.
- Healthcare for the Homeless street health teams are evaluating and advising clients in the encampment or street settings that they outreach.
- On March 21, 2020, Contra Costa's Health Services Health Officer requested a moratorium on homeless encampment abatement from all law enforcement agencies in the County. This will reduce unnecessary community movement and loss of connections with service providers.

Is the County participating in Project Roomkey, the California's hotel initiative?

- Contra Costa County has procured 450 hotel rooms so far under Project Roomkey, allowing about 350 shelter residents who are at high risk of serious illness from COVID-19 due to their age or health to isolate themselves more effectively.
- About 100 rooms secured through Project Roomkey are reserved for members of our county's homeless population who test positive for COVID-19, who are awaiting test results, or who have been exposed to someone with COVID-19 and need to quarantine themselves.

How does the County decide who goes into hotel/motel rooms?

- People who qualify under Project Roomkey are given priority:
- People without housing who test positive for COVID-19 and do not require hospitalization, but need to isolate
- People without housing who have been exposed to someone with COVID-19 who need to quarantine
- People without housing who are at high risk of serious illness due to their age or health



- People who are staying in emergency shelters are also given priority, because the health officer has determined it is difficult or impossible to maintain proper physical distancing in shelters, so people living at these facilities are at higher risk.

What is the County doing for persons who do not qualify for hotels during this time?

- Our street outreach teams are working hard to keep people living outdoors healthy and educated about how to reduce their risk to COVID-19 and are distributing hand sanitizer and other hygiene supplies.
- We are partnering with several cities, including Antioch, Martinez, Richmond and Walnut Creek, to place handwashing stations and portable toilets in areas frequented by people living outside.
- We have asked local police agencies not to displace encampments during the pandemic to reduce the spread of the virus.
- Our Public Health street medicine team continues to evaluate patients living outdoors.

What if people experiencing homelessness display symptoms?

- Shelter providers should follow Contra Costa Health Service guidance regarding care of symptomatic persons, including arranging for isolation or medical attention as directed.

How do people experiencing homelessness get tested?

- Contra Costa Healthcare for the Homeless works with homeless service providers to arrange for testing and notify providers of the test results, which now may be available within 24 hours.
- For more information about testing for people experiencing homelessness click [here](#).

How do homeless services providers obtain resources, including supplies and equipment?

- Contra Costa Health Services recommends service providers review and complete a Sanitation & Hygiene Self-Assessment to determine their needs.
- The process for requesting resources first begins with the service provider contacting their City emergency management services representative to fulfill their request and cc'ing Branch.HHH@cchealth.org to notify Health Housing & Homeless Services that



they have requested resources from the City. The City will communicate with the County if the City is unable to fill the request.

- Please note: Contra Costa Health Services does not fill resource requests outside of this process but is available to help direct the request to the appropriate entity.

How has COVID-19 impacted the County's efforts to ensure people experiencing homelessness can participate in the 2020 Census?

- The County plans to use volunteers and staff to host mobile outreach and access points and enumeration for the Census has been delayed pending further guidance on social distancing from Contra Costa Health Services and participation options from the U.S. Census.
- The County will continue to monitor and review the timeframe and options for when and how to enumerate persons experiencing homelessness in the County.

Are behavioral health treatment services still available for persons experiencing homelessness during the period of the shelter-in-place orders?

- Yes. Regional mental health clinics are open for in-person visits as needed. However, most services are provided remotely using telephone or telehealth. Requests for mental health and/or substance use services still can be made through the Behavioral Health Access Line: 1-888-678-7277. An alternate number for these services is 1-800-846-1652.

Are staff serving persons experiencing homelessness expected to go to work?

- Homeless service providers are essential workers under the shelter in place order and will continue serving individuals and households experiencing homelessness.
- Per health officer order, workers at licensed care facilities and other congregate living facilities, including those that serve people experiencing homelessness, must wear masks while at the facility and conduct symptom screenings to ensure staff who exhibit symptoms of COVID-19 do not risk infecting other staff members or individuals served at the site.
- Homeless shelters continue to serve existing clients, but a health officer order on April 14 has temporarily prohibited shelters in Contra Costa from accepting new clients.



- Shelter providers should follow Contra Costa Health Service Congregate Living and Street Outreach guidance regarding preventing and managing the spread of COVID-19 among staff.

Where can I go for the latest information on the County's response?

- Contra Costa Health Services has the latest updates at [16APR2020-Coronavirus-and-Homelessness.docx](#)

