Preventing the Spread of COVID-19 in Congregate Housing Settings
Frequently Asked Questions
April 18, 2020

Full guidance for Community Congregate Living Settings for Those Who Are Housed In Private Rooms is posted at www.sfcdcp.org/covid19 under “Congregate Living Settings.”

AUDIENCE:
The following FAQs were developed by the San Francisco Department of Public Health for use by staff in community congregate living settings where individuals and households are living in their separate room and there may be sharing of bathrooms or cooking facilities between households. A household is all the people who may live in an independent enclosed space. This includes:

- Single resident occupancy hotels (SROs)
- Permanent supportive housing (PSH)
- Public/affordable/subsidized housing sites
- Shelter or transitional housing with private rooms
- Independent Senior Housing
- Co-operatives

This does NOT include adult homeless shelters or navigation centers (See Preventing Spread of COVID-19 among Persons Experiencing Homelessness, posted at www.sfcdcp.org/covid19 under “Persons Experiencing Homelessness”), 24-hour drop-in centers, domestic violence shelters, shelters for families and transitional age youth, residential care facilities for the elderly (RCFEs, including Board and Care – which should rely on guidance produced by the California Department of Social Services), residential mental health or substance use disorder treatment programs, medical respite, or long-term care facilities (posted at www.sfcdcp.org/covid19hcp under “Long Term Care and Senior Care”).

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:

Will building staff (services and/or property manager) be notified if a tenant tests positive for COVID-19 or is being tested for COVID-19?

- Building managers will be notified by the Department of Public Health (DPH) about positive COVID-19 cases within the building. To respect individual privacy, identifying information of the positive case will not be shared with building managers unless:
  - The benefit to public health is deemed to outweigh the protection of individual privacy, OR
  - The tenant consents to disclosing their identity to building managers and staff.
- The DPH team will help identify and notify those who may have been exposed and provide information and guidance to the building manager about how to reduce the risk of transmission to others, and how to clean.
- Building managers may be notified of a symptomatic person awaiting testing if there is determined to be a public health need.
What do we tell other tenants if someone in the building is self-isolating or is positive for COVID-19? What health guidance do we need to provide to other tenants?

Some people who have COVID-19 do not experience any symptoms but are still able to transmit the virus to others. For this reason, tenants should take steps at all times to prevent being exposed. Knowing that someone in the building is self-isolating or positive does not change this recommendation. Tenants (and staff) should continue to practice everyday preventive actions that can help prevent the spread of germs:

- Stay home when you are ill, except to get medical care.
- Always wear a face covering when leaving the home or around other people. This is important even if you do not have symptoms of a cold or flu.
  - Face coverings should cover the nose and mouth and may be made from a variety of materials, such as bandanas, scarves, t-shirts, sweatshirts or towels. Always wash your hands, or use hand sanitizer, before and after touching your face or face coverings. Cloth face coverings should be washed frequency with detergent and hot water and dried on a hot cycle.
- Practice social distancing (maintaining a distance of 6 feet from others and avoiding groups). Avoid close contact with people you do not live with.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after using the bathroom, before eating, and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing. If soap and water are not readily available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% ethanol. Always wash your hands with soap and water if your hands are visibly dirty.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue, under the neck of your shirt, or into your elbows
- Clean frequently touched surfaces and objects daily (e.g., tables, countertops, light switches, doorknobs, and cabinet handles) using a regular household detergent and water.
- Get your flu shot to protect against flu which has symptoms similar to COVID-19.
- Tenants who are concerned that they have COVID-19 should contact their medical provider. If they do not have a medical provider or cannot get tested through their medical provider, they can call: 415-554-2830. If testing is indicated, they will be scheduled for an appointment at one of SFDPH’s alternate testing sites.

How do we clean communal kitchens and bathrooms after a confirmed COVID-19 has been in our building?

Please refer to “Appendix A: COVID-19 Minimum Environmental Cleaning Standards” within the guidance for Community Congregate Living Settings posted at www.sfcdcp.org/covid19 under “Congregate Living Settings.”

For tenants, please refer Cleaning Recommendations for Home & Residential Settings with Persons with Known or Suspect COVID-19 Infection posted at www.sfcdcp.org/covid19 under “Cleaning Recommendations”.

Do staff need to wear masks and gloves? In what situations?

- All staff should wear masks or cloth face coverings when within 6 feet of other people (staff or tenants) to limit the spread of germs.
Face coverings should cover the nose and mouth and may be made from a variety of materials, such as bandanas, scarves, t-shirts, sweatshirts or towels. Always wash your hands, or use hand sanitizer, before and after touching your face or face coverings. Cloth face coverings should be washed frequency with detergent and hot water and dried on a hot cycle.

- Gloves are not recommended except where otherwise indicated (e.g. contact with refuse or bodily fluids), but staff should wash their hands often with soap and water.

When can a staff member return to work, if they have had cold or flu-like symptoms or confirmed COVID-19?

Please refer to Ending Home Isolation and Returning to Work, posted at www.sfcdcp.org/covid19 “Home Isolation and Returning to Work.” Staff may return when:

- They have had at least 3 days in a row with no fever at all without taking any fever-reducing medication (e.g. Tylenol, acetaminophen, Advil, ibuprofen, Aleve, Naproxen); AND
- If they had symptoms like cough or shortness of breath, they are getting better; AND
- It has been at least 7 days since they were diagnosed or their symptoms first started.

When do tenants need to wear masks?

- Masks or cloth face coverings over the face and mouth are recommended when going outside for essential activities or when in close proximity (within 6 feet) to others. Face coverings should cover the nose and mouth and may be made from a variety of materials, such as bandanas, scarves, t-shirts, sweatshirts or towels. Always wash your hands, or use hand sanitizer, before and after touching your face or face coverings. Cloth face coverings should be washed frequency with detergent and hot water and dried on a hot cycle.
- Tenants who are sick or being tested for COVID-19 (person under investigation) should stay quarantined and wear a mask if interacting with others.

Since masks are in short supply, if someone has a mask, how can they extend its use?

- Masks can be worn for multiple days when there is a shortage, but a given mask can only be worn by one person and should not be shared.
- Masks may be worn until they are wet, soiled, or damaged.
- When masks are not being worn, they should be individually hung to dry. Ensure they are clearly labeled and not touching any other masks when stored to avoid spreading germs.
- Masks can also be stored in paper bags, but should not be stored in plastic bags or containers. Ensure the storage bag is clearly labeled.

How can people or staff supporting the wellness of tenants with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 provide assistance?

- Monitor the tenant for worsening symptoms. Know the emergency warning signs.
- Have their healthcare provider’s contact information on hand.
- If they are getting sicker, call their healthcare provider. For medical emergencies, call 911 and notify the dispatch personnel that they have or are suspected to have COVID-19.
If anyone develops **emergency warning signs** for COVID-19 get **medical attention immediately**. Emergency warning signs include:

- Trouble breathing
- Persistent pain or pressure in the chest
- New confusion or inability to arouse
- Bluish lips or face
- any other symptoms that are severe or concerning.

For more guidance, use the [CDC’s online tool](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html) to help you make medical decisions for COVID-19 symptoms.

- If the person does not have a health care provider and you need to seek consultation, contact Tom Waddell Urgent Care, 50 Ivy Street and preferably call ahead (415-713-1963), or ZSFGH Urgent Care (628-206-8000).

Ensure tenants’ basic needs are being met.

- Ensure tenants are able to access food and medication while on home-isolation
- Ensure tenants are well enough to feed themselves, get to the bathroom, and take their medications.
- Assess tenants’ ability to adhere to home isolation

**Should community rooms be closed if tenants are not social distancing?**

*To the extent possible, tenants should be encouraged to maintain social distance (no groups and people stay 6 feet apart). Some community rooms provide an essential function for tenants (i.e. kitchens and food pantries) and these rooms should not be closed. To limit the spread of infection and protect everyone’s health, consider implementing the following:*:

- Revise the community room occupancy limits to promote social distancing. People should maintain social distance (a distance of 6 feet from one another and avoiding groups of people) at all times.
- Create a schedule for use of the common rooms to limit the number of people in the room at any one time.
- Advise tenants to wear cloth covering the nose and mouth when in community rooms, in addition to physical distancing and frequent hand washing.
- Disinfect the frequently-touched surfaces before/after each use.
- Increase the frequency of cleaning in the common room.

**Can tenants have visits with residents from within the same building?**

*To limit the potential of exposure to COVID-19, it is discouraged for tenants to visit with others, even if they reside within the same building.*

**How will persons who have symptoms of COVID-19 infection in Congregate Housing be assigned a hotel unit so they can be isolated? What is the DPH process?**

- People who have suspected or confirmed COVID-19 infection should self-quarantine as best as possible in their room. Social service and health care providers may request a room to isolate residents who have suspected or confirmed COVID-19, or who have had close contact with a person with confirmed COVID-19, by completing a web-based intake form at [https://covid19isorequest.getcare.com/referral](https://covid19isorequest.getcare.com/referral). Placement will depend on room availability and whether client needs can be met in these spaces.
• If a tenant with COVID-19 has a private bedroom and bathroom, they can isolate at home and likely will not need a hotel room.

• If a resident with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 requires food support to safely self-isolate, *social service and health care providers and members of the public* can email the EOC Feeding Unit at iqfeedingunit@sfgov.org.

**If a resident says they have suspected or confirmed COVID-19, how can we know if that is true?**

• Because it is protected health information, there is no way to confirm if a specific resident has COVID-19 without the resident’s consent.

• Building managers will be notified by the Department of Public Health (DPH) about positive COVID-19 cases within the building but not generally be given identifying information because this is protected health information.

• All residents and staff should take steps to prevent the spread of germs at all times including avoiding close contact, washing hands frequently, wearing a face covering when near others, staying isolated if you are sick, and regularly cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched surfaces.