

# COVID-19 Guidance for Sheltering in Tribal Communities

JHCAIH understands that events related to COVID-19 are moving quickly and acknowledge that some of the guidance provided in this document may not be applicable as new developments unfold. We therefore advise you to adhere first and foremost to guidance provided by your tribal and state governments.

It is important for Tribal communities to have a plan for sheltering community members who are COVID-19 positive. In some cases, Tribes will require people who test positive with COVID-19 stay in their own homes and other Tribes will create “shelters” that people who have COVID-19 can go to stay.

## Sheltering in the home

If someone in the home is sick with COVID-19 it is important to provide space for the individual to isolate away from others, while also allowing for care. The following are general guidelines for sheltering within one’s own home:

- **Try to maintain physical separation from other members of the household whenever possible, especially elders and those who are considered high risk for COVID-19. If possible, provide a separate bedroom and bathroom for the individual to limit the spread through shared space and surfaces**
- **If more than one member of the household is sick, the individuals can isolate together away from other members of the household**
- **Limit physical contact such as hugging or sharing food and drinks or utensils**
- **Designate one member of the household to care for the individual who is sick. This person should be low-risk for COVID-19, should limit contact with other members of the household**
- **Caretakers should follow strict handwashing and cleaning practices, including wearing a mask, washing hands frequently with soap for 20 seconds (or using hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are not available)**
- **Caretakers should clean and disinfect shared surfaces, such as doorknobs and faucets, regularly**
- **Avoid sharing household or personal items such as towels, dishes, bedding, phones, or toys**
- **Avoid unnecessary visitors from outside of the household**
- **Take care of the mental and emotional health of all household members**

## Guidance on shared spaces

If providing a separate bedroom and/or bathroom is not possible, here are some ways to limit close contact:

- **Increase air ventilation by opening windows and doors, if it is safe to do so without creating additional health hazards (such as asthma triggered by outdoor smoke or allergens)**
- **Try to maintain at least six feet of separation between individuals**
- **Place a divider between beds or sleeping areas to isolate the individual who is sick. Some materials could include a plastic tarp, sheet/quilt, or cardboard**
- **Encourage the sick individual to wear a mask whenever possible, especially when others are in the room**
- **Frequently clean all shared surfaces such as doorknobs, countertops, and faucets, especially in shared bathrooms and bedrooms**
- **Wear disposable gloves and mask, and improve ventilation when cleaning bathrooms or bedrooms**

## Guidance for caregivers in the household

For most individuals, symptoms of COVID-19 will subside after about a week. Treat the symptoms by:

- **Make sure the individual rests at home and stays hydrated with lots of fluids**
- **Treat non-severe symptoms such as fever, sore throat, headache, and chills with over-the-counter medicines**

Monitor for signs of severe health conditions related to COVID-19. Seek emergency care if you observe the following symptoms:

- **Difficulty breathing**
- **Continual pain or pressure in the chest**
- **New confusion**
- **Bluish lips or face**

## Sheltering tribal community members outside of the home

Communities may elect to designate a shelter space for community members who test positive for COVID-19 and are not able (or do not wish) to shelter at home. **These facilities are not designed for severe cases of COVID-19**, but rather serve as a space for proper isolation of COVID-positive individuals. The following are general guidelines for identifying and establishing a community shelter space.

## Step 1. Identify the facility

Facilities for communal COVID-19 sheltering could contain fully private spaces (such as separate kitchens and living areas) or could make use of communal rest rooms and dining spaces. It is important to keep these facilities isolated from the general public. **Spaces designated for communal sheltering should be vacated** and not housing individuals who are not COVID-positive. Some examples could include:

- Hotels, motels, or vacant apartment buildings
- Retreat or conference centers
- School or college dormitory buildings (fully vacated)
- Large building space that can be converted to contain temporary private living spaces and beds
- Vacant government or privately-owned property

Ensure that the facility is in compliance with local building codes and legal requirements (for example, the building must meet fire protection and environmental standards and be ADA compliant). Coordinate with local health officials to ensure compliance with current COVID-19 guidance.

## Step 2. Procure supplies and resources

Tribal leaders should procure supplies and equipment such as cots, beds, blankets, toiletries, over-the-counter medicines, food, and other living essentials. Leaders should also ensure proper services are in place for cleaning the facility and providing care.

In order to do this, the facility must have enough staff. Suggestions for meeting staffing requirements are listed below:

- Identify local organizations with specialized volunteer staff (e.g. healthcare, cooking, etc.)
- Identify staff from local tribal or non-governmental organizations (such as social services, health promotion, community health workers, etc.) who have capacity to work at the facility
- Establish contracts with local tribal businesses or employment/staffing agencies.

Ensure that managers of the facility provide proper support for staff, and monitor staff members' health for signs of fatigue, stress, or illness.

## Step 3. Establish a system for registration

All individuals housed at the community shelter must register. Establish a system for registering individuals that includes gathering contact information (name, address, phone number or email address) as well as emergency contact and healthcare provider contact information.

Ensure that the registration process includes any necessary liability or legal waivers or agreements – these details will vary and Tribal officials should serve as the final authority to ensure these agreements are adequate.

Consider the physical space and arrangement of registration areas. Some suggestions include:

- Ensure that all registration areas have enough space for six feet of separation between individuals. Provide hand sanitizer stations and disposable masks for any individuals who do not have one
- Protect staff by creating barriers or dividers (such as plexiglass) at registration areas, or use self-service

kiosks whenever possible.

- Ensure that individuals' registration information is stored in a secure and accessible location, whether on paper or in an electronic database, and all health and personal information must meet HIPPA requirements for secure storage.
- Ensure that contact tracing systems and communication are in place so that individuals registering for shelter are able to receive COVID-19 testing and begin contact tracing (if necessary)

## Step 4. Health Support Services

It is important to ensure health support services are in place for Tribal members who will be staying in the facility. Health support services should include:

- Medical personnel. This includes multiple on-call health professionals such as medical doctors and nurses.
- Behavioral and Mental health personnel. On-call behavioral health professionals/ crisis counselors should be identified. These can come from Tribal organizations and/or Non-governmental organizations with specialized staff. Virtual capability should be considered for providing these services as much as possible
- Infant and child food hygiene and support. Special attention needs to be given to ensure proper support for infants and children (see Step 6 for more details on nutritional support).

## Step 5. Custodial Services

It is important to keep the facility as clean as possible to avoid possible spread of COVID-19. Considerations include:

- Environmental cleaning. Ensure there is laundry equipment or services to allow linens (such as bed sheets, blankets and towels) to be washed in hot water. Provide laundry soap and tumble dry on a hot setting. Also, information should be provided about infection control and safe handling of contaminated linens to laundry workers.
- Waste management. There should be increased frequency of garbage collection and a place certified for infectious waste disposal in a "Do Not Touch" waste receptacle. All waste should be treated as infectious.

## Step 6. Establish Food Service

It is important to provide healthy food to all individuals staying in the communal facility. The food service systems will vary, but the following are some considerations when putting food service in place:

- Develop written agreements with local vendors, non-governmental organizations, and/or food banks to provide food at the facility
- Ensure adequate staffing of personnel to distribute food in a safe manner to those in isolation
- Determine whether local restaurants can qualify as a vendor, through the Public Assistance Programs
- Consider dietary needs and be prepared to provide different food options for infants, children, and those with food allergies or dietary restrictions

## References

Guidance and Tips for Tribal Community Living During COVID-19. Accessed December 7, 2020.  
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/tribal/social-distancing.html#Recommendations>

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