

Guidance for Homeless Shelters, Warming Centers, and Homeless Meal-sharing Operations

The Santa Barbara County Public Health Department (PHD) has collected information and guidance that may be helpful to organizations working with our homeless and housing-insecure populations.

The spread of coronavirus disease (COVID-19), both globally and here in California, has created concern in our community. While there is uncertainty about how the virus will continue to spread and the extent of the impacts in Santa Barbara County, there are steps we can take now to help keep our community safe from COVID-19 as well as other infectious diseases (such as the flu and common cold). The Santa Barbara County Public Health Department (PHD) has collected information and guidance that may be helpful to organizations working with our homeless and housing-insecure populations.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has developed [Interim Guidance for Homeless Shelters](#). PHD is encouraging all providers of services to homeless or housing-insecure individuals or groups to review this interim guidance.

In addition, as we work together to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in our community, PHD shares the following recommendations:

Handwashing: Encourage and facilitate high-quality, frequent handwashing among clients and staff, especially before eating. Ways to do this include:

- **Sinks.** Where possible, use easily-accessible, fully plumbed handwashing sinks with hot and cold running water, soap in dispensers and paper towels in dispensers, especially in meal service areas and day-use rooms. Consider installing sinks in these areas if possible. Handwashing facilities that can accommodate more than one person at a time (such as trough-style handwashing sinks) are an option as well.
- **Portable sinks.** Provide temporary, self-contained, freestanding handwashing sinks (such as those used at festivals or in conjunction with portable restrooms) at the entrances to buildings, in meal service areas, and in conjunction with any portable toilets. Provide single-use soap and paper towels in dispensers. These may be purchased, or rented through rental agencies.

- **Gravity-flow handwashing systems:** Alternative gravity-flow handwashing stations may be considered as a temporary option. These consist of a container of water, usually 2-5 gallons in capacity, with a spigot that can allow water to flow freely. Place the spigot so that it overhangs the edge of a counter or surface, and have a catch basin or bucket below the spigot to catch wastewater. Provide single-use soap and paper towels in dispensers. Carefully locate these types of handwashing setups so that the water container can be easily refilled and so that wastewater does not create a slip hazard for users and others in the area. Dispose of the wastewater into an approved sewer system, never on the ground.
 - Click [here](#) to view a YouTube video that shows an example of how to construct and set up a temporary hand wash station using a new 5-gallon bucket. Ready-made containers such as insulated drink dispensers or portable water containers may also be used.
- **Hand Sanitizer:** When handwashing facilities are not available, alcohol-based hand sanitizers containing at least 60% alcohol may be used.

Food Service: Nutritious meals are an important part of keeping people healthy. Continue the safe food handling practices you already use to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 in our community. Now is a good time to review and reinforce regular practices such as:

- Having sick employees / volunteers stay home, including those with a fever and/or cough;
- Frequent handwashing for all food handlers using dedicated handwashing sinks (at least 20 seconds of scrubbing with soap and water);
- Getting food only from approved sources, which must have a health permit. Examples include commercial kitchens with health permits, grocery stores and restaurants. Home-prepared food should not be served in homeless shelters or meal-sharing programs;
- Regular sanitizing of work surfaces, food contact surfaces, and multi-use utensils;
- Proper dishwashing, using approved sanitizers;
- Consider temporarily stopping self-service foods, such as buffets or salad bars, and change out serving utensils frequently.

For additional information and guidance on COVID-19, the Santa Barbara County Public Health Department has created a [COVID-19-specific website](#). Information and guidance on COVID-19 prevention measures for food facilities and foodservice groups has been posted on this website and can be found [here](#).

Facility Cleaning & Sanitation: Frequent and thorough cleaning of your facility will help reduce the chance of COVID-19 spreading through your facility. You may wish to review your cleaning processes, and consider:

- Regular and frequent sanitizing of surfaces, paying special attention to high-touch surfaces such as:
 - Tables and countertops;
 - Chair backs and armrests;
 - Telephones, keyboards and touch screens;
 - Door handles;
 - Bathroom fixtures (including bathroom stall locks);
 - Shared entertainment equipment, such as remote controls or game pieces (such as those used for chess/checkers);
 - Shared pens / pencils or other handheld items.
- Increasing airflow and ventilation in your facility. Whenever possible, opening doors and windows to allow fresh outdoor air to circulate is recommended by the Centers for Disease Control.
- The Environmental Protection Agency has provided a [list of disinfectants recommended for use against COVID-19](#).

For additional information and guidance on COVID-19, the Santa Barbara County Public Health Department has created a [COVID-19-specific website](#). Information and guidance on cleaning and other COVID-19 prevention measures has been posted on this website. Please check back regularly for updates and additional information.