

Respiratory Illness Cluster

Infection Control Recommendations for Homelessness Service Settings

Respiratory illness symptoms include coughing, sneezing, fever, and runny nose. Droplets from coughing and sneezing can spread up to two metres and can live on surfaces (e.g., influenza can live on surfaces for up to 48 hours) and be picked up from others. If there is an increase in respiratory illnesses at your site, here are some things that you and your staff can do to help protect yourselves and clients:

Hand Hygiene

- Ensure that there is alcohol-based hand rub (also known as ABHR or hand sanitizer), tissues, and masks available at intake, if possible
- Ensure liquid hand soap and alcohol-based hand rub dispensers are checked regularly and kept full
- Encourage regular hand hygiene and consider offering supervised hand hygiene for clients (e.g., have a staff member pump alcohol-based hand rub into client's hands as they enter the dining area)
- Ensure that the alcohol-based hand rub used on site has an alcohol content between 70%-90%
- Provide portable alcohol-based hand rub to staff, if possible
- Put up [Hand Washing](#) and [Hand Sanitizer](#) posters in your site

Environmental Cleaning & Personal Protective Equipment

- Increase the frequency of cleaning and disinfecting at your site, especially for:
 - high-touch surfaces (e.g., door knobs, light switches),
 - common areas (e.g., dining rooms, sleeping quarters, bathrooms), and
 - shared equipment (e.g., telephones, computer keyboard, coffee machines)
- Make sure that your site has an adequate and accessible supply of:
 - personal protective equipment (e.g., gloves, gowns masks),
 - liquid hand soap,
 - alcohol-based hand rub, and
 - cleaning/disinfectant products
- Use appropriate personal protective equipment. Where possible:
 - Offer clients with respiratory illness symptoms to wear masks in common areas. Clients should be educated on the proper use of masks (e.g., changing masks if wet, not wearing masks on their head or dangling around their neck) and have access to new masks

Respiratory Etiquette

- Ensure that there is at least two metres between yourself and someone who is coughing or sneezing. When that is not possible, use other techniques to limit your exposure to respiratory droplets (e.g., stand next to rather than in front of the client)
- Post [Cover your Cough](#) posters in your site and educate clients and staff about respiratory etiquette (e.g., sneeze/cough into your sleeve)

Client Control Measures

- Encourage ill clients to seek healthcare
- Consider restricting or cancelling group activities
- Discourage clients from sharing items that come into contact with their mouth (e.g., utensils, cigarettes/joints, drinks, crystal meth/crack pipes)
- Place mats/cots/beds at least two meters apart. If that is not possible, consider having clients sleep head-to-toe or in a staggered manner to increase the distance between their faces while sleeping

Staff (including students and volunteers) Control Measures

- For respiratory illnesses with an unknown cause, request that ill staff stay home from work until symptoms resolve or until five days after symptom onset, whichever is shorter

- If staff have confirmed influenza, request that they stay home from work until five days after symptom onset
- Inform staff of increase in illness and provide just-in-time training (e.g., review the points in this tip sheet)

Communication

- Inform clients of increase in illness. Post information in a location that clients frequent, if possible
- Inform agency partners (e.g., healthcare, external laundry services) of increase in illness
- If calling first responders (e.g., EMS) to the site, inform them that the site is experiencing an increase in illness and provide illness symptoms

Notify Toronto Public Health Control of Infectious Diseases and Infection Control program (416-338-8563) if there is a significant change in the severity of illness, hospitalizations, or deaths related to this cluster.

For more information, refer to the [Infection Prevention and Control Resources for Homelessness Service Settings](#) webpage.