

**COVID-19 INFORMATION SHEET FOR STAFF:  
SUPPORTING CLIENTS TO FOLLOW COVID-19 MEASURES**  
Shelter, Support and Housing Administration  
Current as of March 21, 2022

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this document is to assist staff in City operated and funded shelter settings, 24-hour respites, and 24-hour women's drop-in providers, including those operating temporary COVID-19 response sites and hotel programs, with information related to supporting clients to follow COVID-19 measures and best practices to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

This document is applicable to staff who have direct interactions with clients, including but not limited to, frontline staff, street outreach staff, and contracted employees such as third party agency staff.

The best way to reduce the likelihood of COVID-19 transmission in the workplace is to have multiple controls in place, including active screening for COVID-19 symptoms, vaccine policies, maintaining a physical distance of two metres from others where possible, and the use of personal protective equipment (PPE).

All homelessness service settings are expected to be in compliance with COVID-19 guidance provided by the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Labour Training and Skills Development, and Toronto Public Health. Staff providing supports in shelters can refer to the [Congregate Living Setting Resources Toolkit](#) for guidance on providing support in congregate living settings.

## **Protect yourself**

All staff should first and foremost take steps to protect themselves. Follow all current public health guidance and recommendations including wearing appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), practicing physical distancing, washing your hands, getting tested if you have symptoms, and getting vaccinated.

- Know about health and safety matters including the potential exposure to COVID-19, and stay up to date with information, instructions, education, and training provided by your organization, and trusted information sources, such as the City of Toronto's [COVID-19 Guidance: Homelessness Services & Congregate Living Settings](#) and [Toronto Public Health](#).
- Attend training and follow your employer's safe work procedures (e.g., how to protect yourself and your coworkers from COVID-19, and how to work safely with hazardous products).
- Immediately report any health and safety concerns to your supervisor.

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### **Supporting clients through staff-client relationships**

It is important to acknowledge that clients may be experiencing a high degree of uncertainty, worry, anxiety, and stress about their health and safety, in addition to other health challenges. It is important to recognize these impacts and try to understand client needs.

Staff relationships with clients are key to supporting clients and helping them understand COVID-19 measures. A strong staff-client relationship can facilitate cooperation and provide greater opportunities to learn about a client's unique health needs. This enables staff to better connect clients with additional supports and resources. Appendix 1 lists resources to support clients.

- Staff can try some [basic steps to help create an initial bond with the client](#).
- Staff can work together with other colleagues who may have existing relationships or rapport with clients in order to build familiarity and trust.
- Staff can also work with peer champions/ambassadors who have lived experience such as the [Campaign Vaccination Toronto Peer Champions](#) who work with vaccine leads and staff at shelter sites to support and improve vaccination efforts.

### **General [strategies](#) to increase awareness of COVID-19 practices and measures for clients**

- Inform staff and clients about actions being taken to keep everyone safe (e.g., posting signs).
- Communicate openly about COVID-19 policies and procedures, and their impact on the shelter site, staff, and clients.
- Management should provide staff training on the required public health measures and subsequent updates so staff are informed and can share with clients.
- Display information throughout the shelter setting to promote messages about how to stay safe during the COVID-19 pandemic, including [COVID-19: Posters & Graphics](#) and [COVID-19 Fact Sheet](#).

### **COVID-19 communication for clients**

Some common questions and suggested answers for staff to share with clients may include:

- [How do I self-isolate?](#)
- [Who is a close contact?](#)
- [What is a Rapid Antigen Test?](#)
- [Why should I get vaccinated?](#)

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## Scenarios when clients don't follow COVID-19 measures

There may be situations when a client is not following COVID-19 measures. In these instances, staff should:

- **Explain to the client what the public health requirements are and who they apply to** (i.e., they apply to everyone; or anyone who has symptoms);
- Strongly encourage the client to follow the public health measures. **Use existing relationships and interpersonal skills to address questions and concerns;**
- **Communicate the risks** the client is posing to themselves, other clients and staff at the current site, and the community if they don't follow public health requirements;
- **Provide service to the client**, even if they are not following COVID-19 measures. Continue to work with the client to encourage them to follow public health measures; and
- If required, escalate to Program Manager or Designate for guidance on next steps and resolution.

The following table outlines some specific examples and strategies to encourage clients to follow measures:

Scenario	Strategies
<b>Client is unwilling to wear a medical mask in indoor common areas of the shelter site</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use interpersonal skills to build rapport and ask questions to find out why the client doesn't want to wear a medical mask.</li> <li>• Providers should not require clients who are exempt from wearing a mask to wear one. See <a href="#">Face coverings and face masks (Government of Ontario)</a></li> <li>• If not related to an exemption, explain the public health requirement for all clients to wear a medical mask in indoor common areas.</li> <li>• Offer a medical mask and provide encouragement for the client to wear it. If the client would prefer to wear a N95 mask, please provide one to the client.</li> </ul>
<b>Client is currently staying in shelter and is unwilling to be tested for COVID-19</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask questions to find out why the client doesn't want to be tested for COVID-19.</li> <li>• Provide information about testing – including the option for Rapid Antigen Testing, which can take place on-site at the shelter.</li> <li>• Communicate the importance of testing and the risks the client is posing to themselves, other clients and staff at the current site, and the community if they don't get tested.</li> <li>• Explain that if public health requires them to be tested and they refuse, they will be need to</li> </ul>

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	<p>self-isolate for 10 days. Without clear knowledge on infection status, a shelter site is required to proceed with the assumption of risk.</p>
<p><b>Client has tested positive for COVID-19 and is unwilling to isolate in-situ</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use interpersonal skills to provide information about in-situ isolation and the supports available help people to self-isolate (see information in Appendix 1).</li> <li>• Ask the client what services or supports would help them to self-isolate (i.e., access to cigarettes, safer supply, etc.).</li> <li>• Communicate the importance of self-isolation and the risks the client is posing to themselves, other clients, and staff.</li> <li>• If required, escalate to Program Manager or Designate for guidance on next steps and resolution.</li> <li>• Consult with Agency Review Officer.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Client tests positive for COVID-19 and meets criteria for COVID-19 Isolation and Recovery program but refuses referral</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use interpersonal skills to provide information about COVID-19 Isolation and Recovery Program and what is available there to help people to self-isolate (see information in Appendix 1).</li> <li>• Ask the client if they have any questions or things they want to know about the Isolation and Recovery Program (i.e., how they will get there, how long they will stay, or what will happen after).</li> <li>• Communicate the importance of isolation and the risks the client is posing to themselves, other clients, and staff if they don't isolate.</li> <li>• If required, escalate to Program Manager or Designate for guidance on next steps and resolution.</li> <li>• If further assistance is required, escalate the issue to the SSHA Duty Office.</li> </ul>

If a situation requires further assistance, staff can escalate the issue to the SSHA Duty Office, [SSHADutyOffice@toronto.ca](mailto:SSHADutyOffice@toronto.ca)

If the client requires emergency medical care, call 911

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## Appendix 1. Resources to support clients

### COVID-19 Isolation and Recovery Site

- The COVID-19 Isolation and Recovery Site is a collaboration between the City of Toronto SSHA, Parkdale Queen West CHC, The Neighbourhood Group, University Health Network, and Inner City Health Associates.
- Provides acute episodic care for people who are unable to isolate without supports due to homelessness (including those living in shelters, those who are unsheltered, and some people in precarious or congregate housing).
- Provides medical supports, delivered by a team of nurses, harm reduction workers, peers, client support workers, and physicians.
- [Update regarding the COVID-19 Isolation and Recovery Site for People Experiencing Homelessness](#)
- [Online Referral Form for Shelter, Support and Housing Administration COVID-19 Recovery and Isolation Program, for People Experiencing Homelessness](#)

### Harm Reduction

#### [MOVID: Mobile harm reduction supports](#)

- Available to provide onsite harm reduction supports during outbreaks to people who test positive for COVID-19 and use drugs
- Supports may include: access to cigarettes, managed alcohol program and referrals to safer supply
- Please contact Greg Rosebrugh (PQWCHC) 647-388-8013 [grosebrugh@pqwchc.ca](mailto:grosebrugh@pqwchc.ca); Florencia Leston (TNG) 416-803-5214 [Florencia.Leston@tngcs.org](mailto:Florencia.Leston@tngcs.org) or Karen Tizzard (SSHA) 647-454-2614 [Karen.Tizzard@toronto.ca](mailto:Karen.Tizzard@toronto.ca)

### Overdose Prevention and Response

- City of Toronto's [How to Prevent and Respond to Overdose](#)

### Peer Champions to Promote Vaccination

- The Toronto Shelter Network launched a campaign in efforts to promote vaccination across many sites including, shelter sector, respites, 24-hour women's drop-in, and COVID-hotel program sites.
- Peer champions are individuals with lived experience who work with vaccine leads and staff at shelter sites to support and improve vaccination efforts.
- [Peer Champion Resources](#)

### General Information and Resources on COVID-19

- City of Toronto [webpage](#) – for updates on COVID-19 in Toronto including the [status of cases](#) in shelters and respite sites
- City of Toronto COVID-19 [webpage](#) for Homelessness Services – for resources, tools, measures, and guidelines for homelessness service providers
- City of Toronto COVID-19 Changes to City Services [webpage](#) (Housing and Shelter) – for information about SSHA's COVID-19 response as well as any service updates