

July 21, 2021

Dear King County homeless service providers,

With COVID-19 vaccination rates increasing, on June 30th the State of Washington recently “[reopened](#),” which prompted many changes to COVID-19 prevention guidance in certain sectors. Vaccines have decreased the number of new COVID-19 cases, thus decreasing the risk of outbreaks, hospitalizations, and death in our community overall; however, COVID-19 is still here, and more contagious variants are spreading locally in King County and nationally. To support you at this time of transition, this letter aims to summarize the current recommendations and requirements for homeless service providers that are still in place at this time. While restrictions have been loosened in some industries, homeless service sites encounter unique challenges that support the continued use of our best transmission prevention measures. Characterized by a higher risk of rapid transmission from spending extended periods of time in community with one another, and a higher risk of severe illness associated with COVID-19 infection, the current recommendations for these settings reflect the importance of continued facility-level COVID-19 prevention measures.

[Guidance for non-health care businesses and organizations during COVID-19](#)

All businesses are required to follow [Governor Inslee’s Washington Ready proclamation](#), and are also required to be in compliance with the [Washington State Department of Labor & Industries \(L&I\) guidance, requirements, and policies](#). More information can be found in the [Washington DOH Guidance for Non-Health Care Businesses and Organizations during COVID-19](#).

KEY POINTS:

- Employers must ensure that their operations follow the [main L&I COVID-19 requirements](#) to protect workers.
- **Regardless of vaccination status**, all staff at homeless service sites are required to wear masks.

[Masks at homeless service sites still required](#)

The [Washington Department of Health Secretary Order](#) on face coverings remains in place, and **requires masking, regardless of vaccination status, at homeless service sites** as well as at healthcare settings, correctional facilities, and places where youth are present. Everyone who is not fully vaccinated is also required to wear a mask in all indoor public spaces.

While Washington reopened on June 30th, masks remain part of daily life for many in our community. Here is a [visual guide to where masks are still required in Washington State](#).

KEY POINTS:

- Masks are still required, regardless of vaccination status, at homeless service sites.
- Well fitted, multi-layered masks are proven effective tools for reducing the spread of COVID-19.

Physical distancing at homeless service sites continues to be strongly recommended

While Washington State’s “reopening” allows some businesses and organizations to operate with no capacity limits or physical distancing requirements, homeless service sites still have special recommendations in effect, as outlined in the [Washington State guidance for homeless shelter facilities](#).

Both [CDC](#) and [Washington DOH guidance](#) **recommend that physical distancing continues at homeless service sites** at this time. Regardless of vaccination status, all clients, staff, and volunteers should continue wearing masks and maintaining physical distance. This includes maintaining a minimum of six feet between residents, staff, and visitors at all times, including in dining areas and general sleeping areas.

KEY POINT:

- **Regardless of vaccination status**, all clients, staff, and volunteers should continue wearing masks and maintaining physical distance at homeless service sites.

Isolation & quarantine guidance at homeless service sites

COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective in preventing illness, hospitalization, and death. For this reason, COVID-19 prevention recommendations vary depending on whether someone is fully vaccinated or not. Additionally, there are different recommendations for staff and residents of higher-risk congregate settings than for the general public. These differences are summarized in our Public Health – Seattle & King County [Summary of Quarantine and Testing Guidance by Vaccination Status for Homeless Service Sites](#) guidance document, and key points are highlighted below.

KEY POINTS:

- Fully vaccinated residents and employees of homeless service sites do not need to quarantine after they have had close contact with someone with COVID-19.
- Fully vaccinated residents and employees of homeless service sites should still test after close contact and should monitor for symptoms for 14 days.
- Residents and employees that are **not** fully vaccinated should [quarantine](#) after exposure, get tested ideally 5-7 days after exposure, and monitor for symptoms for 14 days.
- Regardless of whether someone is vaccinated or unvaccinated, if they are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms they should [isolate](#) away from others and seek testing.
- Regardless of whether someone is vaccinated or unvaccinated, if they test positive for COVID-19, they should [isolate](#) away from others to prevent spreading the virus to others.

Indoor air ventilation and filtration

COVID-19 is an airborne virus and can spread easily indoors, especially in crowded spaces. All organizations with indoor facilities should ensure good air ventilation and filtration. Guidance for improving indoor air quality can be found on our Public Health – Seattle & King County [Improving Indoor Air](#) webpage, as well as our [Indoor Air Quality Guide](#) for building operators and business owners. CDC's guidance for homeless service providers also includes a section on [facility ventilation considerations](#).

KEY POINTS:

- Congregate settings should consider improvements to indoor air throughout the facility, including in restrooms, sleeping areas, and kitchen & dining areas.
- Our HEART team is here to assist your facility with ventilation and air quality technical assistance. If your facility acquired portable HEPA air cleaners and you have questions about their proper use, please reach out so we may assist.

Considerations for creating a long-term strategy in homeless service settings

In the face of extreme challenges, homeless service providers have demonstrated unique strengths and incredible resiliency at a time where normal operations have been completely altered. We are working with state and federal partners to identify opportunities for when your sites may consider making modifications to the facility-level COVID-19 prevention measures outlined in this letter. As a community, we are balancing the high risk of rapid transmission and severe illness at congregate settings with the real, unique challenges to mental health stemming from these prolonged COVID-19 prevention measures.

We want to express that you are not alone in this work, and we will be here to work side by side with you as you consider when changes can be made to facility procedures (such as changes to facility layout, face coverings, etc.). We will support you to identify which modifications, in what order, and at what time, can begin to be made at your facility, and will be monitoring COVID-19 activity during the transition period throughout to assist you. When considering when these changes can be made, we'll be evaluating each facility holistically, considering several factors which can include community transmission rates, vaccination coverage at your facility, health risks among clients, and facility layout and client movement. We recognize how challenging it may feel seeing other industries across King County relax facility-level preventive measures. We are so grateful for your persistence (and patience) in continuing to use COVID-19 mitigation strategies to protect clients and staff from COVID-19 in these congregate settings.

As always, please reach out with any questions or concerns. You can call the **Public Health COVID-19 Call Center at 206-477-3977** between 8am-10pm, seven days a week, or report cases or request technical assistance using our COVID-19 intake survey on our COVID-19 homelessness response page (located at <https://kingcounty.gov/depts/health/covid-19/providers/homeless.aspx>).

With appreciation,

Public Health – Seattle & King County

COVID-19 Investigations Team - covid19CST@kingcounty.gov

Health Engagement Action Resource Team (HEART) - CHS.HEART@kingcounty.gov

Mobile Assessment Team (Testing) - MAT.lead@kingcounty.gov