

March 17, 2022

Dear King County homeless service providers,

This letter aims to outline the current recommendations to prevent the spread of COVID-19 at homeless service sites in King County. King County is now classified at a “[low COVID-19 community level](#)” in CDC’s framework, which is determined by looking at hospital beds being used, hospital admissions, and the total number of new COVID-19 cases in an area. It is important to recognize that COVID-19 is still circulating, and some risk remains. During this downward trend in COVID-19 cases, homeless service sites should take actions to stock up on supplies in case of future surges to ensure adequate volumes of personal protective equipment (PPE) including [high quality masks and respirators](#), and other supplies such as test kits and cleaning products. Additionally, sites should focus on efforts such as encouraging vaccination among staff and guests, making improvements to indoor air quality, and developing staffing plans for continuity of essential operations in the case of increased community transmission.

Masks

Based on our current downward trend in hospitalization and case rates, King County’s local indoor mask order ended concurrently with the state’s order after March 11, 2022, as hospitalizations and case numbers have declined, in addition to changing CDC guidance and high vaccination rates. This policy change does not mean COVID-19 is over. Masking is still a critically important public health tool to prevent spread of COVID-19, and **Public Health- Seattle & King County (PHSKC) strongly recommends continued universal mask wearing in high-risk settings at homeless service sites, including indoor spaces where people share the same air such as congregate shelters, meal programs, and day centers.** CDC [recommends strategies](#) for choosing high-quality, well-fitting masks.

Additionally, masks should be worn:

- When someone has symptoms of COVID-19
- When someone has tested positive for COVID-19
- When someone has been exposed to someone with COVID-19
- When required by L&I (consult [WA State Department of Labor & Industries COVID-19 page](#))
- When required by [state or federal law](#)
- When advised by Public Health in an ongoing facility outbreak

Businesses and organizations may choose to implement their own mask requirements at their facilities. Additional masking guidance in King County is located on our [Masking Guidance](#) webpage.

Isolation & Quarantine

CDC recommends that people staying or working in non-healthcare congregate settings isolate and quarantine for 10 full days, regardless of vaccination and booster status. However, during short-term periods of critical staffing shortages, facilities may consider shortening the isolation or quarantine period for either staff or guests, to ensure continuity of operations. Isolation and quarantine length may be considered separately for staff and guests. PHSKC has outlined isolation and quarantine length in the guidance document [Isolation & Quarantine Guidance for People Staying or Working in Non-Healthcare Congregate Settings](#).

King County's Isolation and Quarantine system will continue operation in some capacity through year end, but all organizations should have a well-defined plan for sheltering COVID-19 positive and/or exposed individuals in place should a surge or other delay in accessing IQ services occur. PHSKC has created guidance for [Supporting COVID-19 Positive and Symptomatic Guests within Congregate Shelters](#).

Testing

Testing for COVID-19 is an important outbreak prevention measure at homeless service sites.

MAT testing: The mobile testing team (MAT) is available for facility-wide testing at homeless service sites if a) someone has tested positive and was on site while infectious, or b) if 2 or more individuals are experiencing COVID-like illness and have not been tested. If case numbers continue to stay low, the MAT team will be starting to do more proactive testing to help catch infections earlier.

Point-of-care testing sites: Additionally, sites can become point-of-care COVID-19 testing sites to provide their own rapid testing on site. PHSKC is providing point-of-care facilities with rapid antigen test kits for both screening and diagnostic testing to prevent future outbreaks and respond to ongoing outbreaks. If your organization is interested in becoming a point-of-care testing facility, PHSKC has developed instructional materials below (a checklist, a 20-minute training video and presentation slides) to support your organization with understanding the regulatory and reporting requirements of this program, including applying for a CLIA waiver. Additionally, the MAT team is available to come to sites to do on-site demonstrations and Q&A sessions on point-of-care testing and administering test kits.

- [Point-of-Care COVID-19 Testing Checklist for Homeless Service Providers](#)
- [Point-of-Care COVID-19 Testing: Steps to Becoming a Point-of-Care Site for Homeless Service Providers video \(20 minutes\)](#)
- [Point-of-Care Antigen Testing for Homeless Service Providers - video slide deck](#)

Over-the-counter test kit distribution program: For facilities that are not point-of-care testing sites (i.e. have not applied for a CLIA waiver), King County's [over-the-counter test kit distribution program](#) has ended as of March 11, 2022. Organizations should continue to distribute test kits until your supply is gone.

King County free testing sites: Finally, free testing sites in King County are open to anyone regardless of immigration or insurance status. You can find [COVID-19 testing locations and guidance](#) on our website.

COVID-19 Vaccination

COVID-19 vaccines maximize your protection against COVID-19. Being "up-to-date" with COVID-19 vaccines (including getting a booster shot when you are eligible) provides the most protection against severe illness, hospitalization, and death.

Please reach out to our Mobile Vaccination team at (206) 263-3394 or by emailing MobileVx@kingcounty.gov if you would like to have our team hold a vaccination clinic at your site. Our Health Engagement Action Resource Team (HEART) is available for Q & A sessions with site staff and guests about vaccination and other COVID-19 concerns. HEART can also consult with staff about how to engage with people who may still feel ambivalent about vaccination. Additional locations to get a COVID-19 vaccination are listed on our [PHSKC Getting Vaccinated in King County](#) webpage.

Other mitigation measures for preventing the spread of COVID-19

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 through the use of HVAC systems, portable HEPA air cleaners, and keeping windows open when health and safety permit. 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](#).

HEART can provide 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 or when to replace filters, please reach out (CHS.HEART@kingcounty.gov) so we may assist.

People should continue to follow prevention measures in homeless service sites such as cleaning high touch surfaces and physical distancing, even if they are “up-to-date” on vaccination. HEART can also provide resources and information, and printed copies of our [Safer Cleaning, Sanitizing, and Disinfecting Guide](#), and our [Sanitation and Hygiene Guide](#), which include reference sheets and laminated signs.

Guidance for non-health care businesses and organizations during COVID-19

All businesses are required to follow [Washington State L&I Requirements](#) for preventing COVID-19 (updated March 12, 2022). More information can be found on the L&I COVID-19 [web page here](#).

Stay Informed

We encourage your organization to attend our Wednesday afternoon COVID-19 Homeless Service Provider biweekly calls ([Zoom registration link here](#)). This call includes updates and information regarding COVID-19, addresses questions from the community and provides an opportunity for Public Health to hear from homeless service providers about the most important questions and topics coming up for sites.

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-7pm (or until 10pm for IQ referrals), seven days a week, or report cases or request technical assistance using our [COVID-19 intake survey](#) on our [COVID-19 homelessness response page](#).

With appreciation,

Public Health – Seattle & King County