

2021-05-21

Dear Shelter Partners,

Over the past few weeks, Ottawa Public Health (OPH) has noted an increase in shelter staff either testing positive for COVID-19 or being identified as a close contact of a client or colleague who has tested positive for COVID-19. While the news of decreasing shelter outbreaks over the past few months continues to be encouraging, COVID-19 is still very much present in our community. With the predominance of Variants of Concern (VOCs) in our community, that have the potential of increased transmissibility, it remains critical that all shelter staff continue to strictly adhere to all infection prevention and control (IPAC) and outbreak management best practices in order to reduce risks of COVID-19 transmission.

Please remind shelter team members of the IPAC measures that will protect against infection in the workplace and beyond. On Thursday May 13, the Province of Ontario extended the province-wide Stay-at-Home order until June 2. This requires everyone to remain at home except for essential purposes, such as going to the grocery store or pharmacy, accessing health care services (including getting vaccinated), for outdoor exercise, or for work that cannot be done remotely. The goal is to reduce the risks of further transmission and to protect those who cannot work from home, such as shelter staff, as well as their clients, colleagues and families.

In collaboration with our health system partners, and, OPH continues to roll out vaccines to as many people as we can, as quickly and efficiently as we can. Vaccination of clients and staff is ongoing and is an important part of managing the COVID-19 pandemic. While vaccination provides protection against the virus, vaccination alone will not eliminate immediate risks. As such, OPH would like to remind you about the IPAC measures that continue to offer the best protection against COVID-19 transmission in the shelter setting:

- Ensure staff are wearing properly fitted Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) including a medical mask and eye protection (such as a face shield or goggles) at all times. This is especially critical during interactions with clients and other staff.
- Clients should wear masks or face coverings at all times when using shared spaces, such as common rooms, hallways, elevators, entry ways, etc.
- Physical distancing of 2 m must be maintained between all individuals. Barriers are to be used when this is not possible. (e.g., plexiglass).

Staff must continue to consider each and every interaction with another person as a potential risk for acquiring COVID-19. This includes interactions with fellow staff members, both inside and outside of the workplace. Shelters must ensure that staff are aware of the following recommendations:

- Staff should maintain a 2 metre (6 feet) physical distance in lunchrooms, during breaks, in smoking areas and any other place in which there may be a chance they could congregate.
- Staff should not share any food, drinks or cigarettes. This is even more important during activities where masks may need to be removed (e.g. eating).
- PPE may be removed by following standard doffing procedures during breaks including eating, drinking, restroom use; however, these activities should be done in a separate area while maintaining a minimum distance of 2 metres (6 feet) between all individuals.
- OPH strongly recommends only travelling, for essential purposes, with those from your household to limit the chance for COVID-19 transmission (or if you live alone, one or two essential support people from a single household).
- Staff who may need to carpool should wear a mask, maintain as much distance as possible within the vehicle, and keep the windows down (weather permitting).
- Enhanced cleaning and disinfection practices of high touch surfaces should be in place (e.g., tables, door handles, chairs, etc.)
- Frequent hand hygiene (with soap and water or alcohol-based hand rub) is necessary after contact with potentially contaminated surfaces or at any time when masks and eye protection are put on or taken off.
- Staff should be aware that they must stay home and seek testing if they are symptomatic.

We are at a very important juncture in this pandemic. It is more important than ever that everyone, collectively, remain vigilant in adhering to public health measures. OPH continues to work closely with the City of Ottawa, Ottawa Inner City Health, and shelter partners to coordinate responses and to reduce the risk of ongoing COVID-19 transmission.

Thank you for your on-going commitment to reducing COVID-19 risks in our community. It is through our collective efforts that we can ensure the shelter network – and the people who make use of these networks – are supported.

Sincerely,



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