

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) regarding COVID 19 for Affordable Housing Operators

Updated May 4, 2020

This FAQ is intended to provide information for affordable housing operators and property management staff to support their tenants during the COVID 19 pandemic *This guidance is subject to change do to the rapidly changing information regarding COVID 19.*

All housing operators, tenants property managers and service providers should utilize the guidance provided online from the Vermont Department of Health, especially, [guidance on long-term care and group living facilities](#) and new guidance on preventing the spread of COVID-19 for managers and owners of [apartment complexes](#) and [senior living communities](#) at healthvermont.gov/covid19-groupliving.

In addition, all Vermonters should visit the CDC website for the most up to date information especially, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/index.html> ([Interim Guidance for Implementing Home Care of People Not Requiring Hospitalization for Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#)).

1. What is best practice when turning over a unit that was occupied by someone who had COVID 19? <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/cleaning-disinfection.html>
 - Follow Interim Guidance for [US Institutions of Higher Education](#) on working with state and local health officials to isolate ill persons and provide temporary housing as needed.
 - Close off areas visited by the ill persons. Open outside doors and windows and use ventilating fans to increase air circulation in the area. Wait 24 hours or as long as practical before beginning cleaning and disinfection.
 - In areas where ill persons are being housed in isolation, follow [Interim Guidance for Environmental Cleaning and Disinfection for U.S. Households with Suspected or Confirmed Coronavirus Disease 2019](#). This includes **focusing on cleaning and disinfecting common areas where staff/others providing services may come into contact with ill persons but reducing cleaning and disinfection of bedrooms/bathrooms used by ill persons to as-needed.**
 - In areas where ill persons have visited or used, continue routine cleaning and disinfection as in this guidance.
 - If it has been more than 7 days since the person with suspected/confirmed COVID-19 visited or used the facility, additional cleaning and disinfection is not necessary.
2. Which of our facilities, like senior and senior congregate facilities would be considered appropriate testing sites in the event of someone thought to have symptoms or testing positive?

IMPORTANT: Everyone must have a referral from their health care provider in order to be tested. CALL your health care provider to be evaluated and for the provider to determine

Please also see <https://www.healthvermont.gov/response/coronavirus-covid-19/long-term-care-and-group-living-settings>

Proactive Outreach

VDH is contacting all long-term care facilities, nursing homes, assisted living facilities, and senior housing facilities proactively to review strategies to prevent COVID-19 infection and develop plans to respond immediately if an infection is identified. VDH completed an in-depth assessment by phone and provide guidance about personal protective equipment and other infection prevention and control recommendations. We continue to stay in touch for any technical assistance needs and additional questions. See Question

- 3. Who is the appropriate contact person at VDH for staff to be in touch with, or from whom should we expect to hear if VDH became aware of a person with a positive test for COVID 19 in one of our properties?**

VDH will reach out to the individual who tests positive and determine through tracing if others in the building have likely been exposed. VDH will contact potentially exposed individuals directly and instruct them on what to do. VDH will ask them what their needs are for obtaining essential goods and services and help them identify resources that will help them stay isolated.

The COVID-19 hotline is (802)863-7240.

- 4. If I give a list of my properties to VDH and contact information, can they call me when someone returns to one of my units after being treated for COVID 19?**

VDH guidance instructs health care professionals to consult with Health Department Staff to assess whether the patient is returning to a setting that is appropriate for home care. This guidance is available: https://www.healthvermont.gov/sites/default/files/documents/pdf/HAN-COVID-19-HospitalDischarge.04.10.2020.final_.pdf

- 5. Can VDH test the residents in the buildings I manage/own?**

Updated information on Testing can be found at <https://governor.vermont.gov/press-release/governor-phil-scott-announces-enhanced-testing-and-contact-tracing-programs>

- 6. What is the recommended protocol to respond to a COVID19 positive case in a congregate housing setting where the residents shared kitchens and bathrooms?**

VDH guidance suggests that medical professionals working with vulnerable Vermonters will work with VDH to assess patients' environment; including their ability to self-quarantine and determine what the appropriate next steps will be for that individual. See Health Alert: Hospital Discharge for COVID-19 Patients for more information.

In addition, AHS has developed isolation and recovery housing options for households who have tested positive or are suspected to be positive for COVID 19, do not need hospitalization and cannot isolate effectively in their current living situation.

<https://humanservices.vermont.gov/help-and-resources/covid-19-information>

- 7. Will VDH issue guidance on safe work practices as we gradually come back to work?**

Please see Governor Scott's *Addendum 10 to Executive Order 01-20, Work Smart & Stay Safe - Restart VT: Phase I* <https://governor.vermont.gov/press-release/governor-phil-scott-outlines-principles-and-safety-precautions-phased-restart-vermont>.

AHS has a group that is planning for the re-opening of homeless shelters, with technical assistance being provided by VDH.

Also, see: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/shared-congregate-house/guidance-shared-congregate-housing.html#Additional-CDC-resources>

8. How do housing operators encourage COVID-19 prevention among staff and tenants?

Post visible plain-language and large font signage <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/communication/factsheets.html> that encourages proper handwashing and discourages unnecessary visitors, especially those who are showing cold or flu-like symptoms. Housing operators should ensure all visitors are educated on proper hygiene and social distancing practices and signing into visitors log. Housing operators should translate signage into different languages, as appropriate to your residents.

While supplies are difficult to secure, install handwashing stations and/or sanitizer stations at common lobbies that serve multiple housing units.

9. What if maintenance must go inside the apartment of someone who is + for COVID 19? Will we be able to get more/ enhanced PPE supplies?

- PPE for Maintenance Workers entering unit of COVID+ resident
- Defer non-essential maintenance
- Wash/sanitize hands before entering unit
- When entering resident unit, wear cloth face covering and gloves (Information on face coverings here: https://vem.vermont.gov/sites/demhs/files/COVID19/COVID-19_VDH_mask_guidance-04-08-20.pdf)
- Maintain minimum 6 feet distance between worker and resident (ideally in separate room)
- Wash/sanitize hands upon exiting unit
- Any other any other site- and task-specific infection prevention and control measures implemented by the facility

More here from CDC: Guidance for workers: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/retirement/guidance-retirement-response.html>

Housing operators can use the link below to order PPE:

<https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=O5O0IK26PEOcAnDtzHVZxnYHsES1qh9Hs2EGYmwc2tBURDVPSDJDS1hUTzdJMFixVDZHQ1JHS1cxViQIQCN0PWcu>

10. What guidance is there for housing operators when someone in the building is suspected of having COVID 19?

In residential buildings in traditional apartments (own bedroom and bathroom), housing operators should check in with tenant via phone, ask screening questions (attached to this document) and encourage them to see their primary care doctor.

Also, housing operators can educate tenants on self-quarantine and other precautions to prevent spread. Housing operators may offer the tenant a mask to use when they are in

common areas (although tenants cannot be forced to where it) To protect others in the building, follow guidelines for cleaning and sanitizing common areas:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/cleaning-disinfection.html>.

11. What if a tenant is *potentially* positive for COVID 19 and refuses to follow social distancing expectations?

If someone is suspected of having COVID 19 and the individual cannot isolate/quarantine in place because the setting does not allow for it, the housing operator can help the tenant apply for isolation and quarantine housing at Harbor Place. Please note, Harbor Place requires a referral from a medical provider. Harbor Place referral protocol is available at the end of this document.

12. What is the process if someone tests positive in my building?

If the tenant has their own apartment and bathroom, and does not need to be hospitalized, the tenant should follow the isolation orders of their medical provider.

VDH will reach out to the individual who tests positive and determine through tracing if others in the building have likely been exposed. VDH will contact potentially exposed individuals directly and instruct them on what to do. VDH will ask them what their needs are for obtaining essential goods and services and help them identify resources that will help them stay isolated.

In addition, VDH has provided guidance that instructs health care professionals to consult with Health Department Staff to assess whether the patient is returning to a setting that is appropriate for home care. This guidance is available

https://www.healthvermont.gov/sites/default/files/documents/pdf/HAN-COVID-19-HospitalDischarge.04.10.2020.final_.pdf,

13. Will there be a waiver to HIPAA that allows VDH to tell the building owner/property manager/housing authority which tenant is positive for COVID 19?

The new VDH guidance takes this question into account on a case-by-case basis. There are no plans for a blanket waiver to HIPAA for this purpose at this time. For more information on this see – [Health Alert: Hospital Discharge for COVID-19 Patients](#).

14. What if a person tests positive in one of my high-density buildings?

The person who tests positive would be notified and instructed to self-isolate and their contacts would be identified, as in any other case. VDH has a protocol for high-density buildings that allows them to mobilize testing for all of the tenants where a person tested positive for COVID 19. However, this protocol is subject to the requirements listed in the answer to question 8.

15. What is the threshold for density/size of building to receive testing of all residents and staff when a positive case is identified?

Currently, VDH will test in any of the following facilities that have a single case in a resident or staff person:

- Health care facilities (e.g., long-term care, assisted living, rehab)
- Correctional facilities
- Homeless shelters
- Certain housing authority properties

- Other non-profit affordable housing developments on a case by case basis (depending on epidemiological information) and dependent upon resources.

However, for any non-medical site, a single medical point of contact for receipt of test results and notification of residents must be identified prior to the Health Department deploying a sampling team.

If an appropriate medical provider cannot be identified, the following will need to be provided to the Health Department before sampling begins:

- Contact information for residents and staff who will be tested including address and phone number
- Name of each resident's medical provider and their practice name/location
- Identification of any special needs such as interpreter services

16. I am concerned that the people who are positive for COVID 19 are also the people who will not follow medical guidance about isolation and self-quarantine.

New VDH guidance suggests that medical professionals working with vulnerable Vermonters will work with VDH to assess patients' environment; including their ability to self-quarantine and determine what the appropriate next steps will be for that individual. See [Health Alert: Hospital Discharge for COVID-19 Patients](#) for more information.

In addition, The State Emergency Operations Center has designed a statewide public health response referred to as Isolation/Quarantine & Recovery (I/R) Housing. I/R Housing is designed for people who test positive for COVID-19 who do not need hospital-level medical attention, but who cannot return to their primary place or location of residence. I/R Housing is not a medical strategy, but a temporary housing strategy in which people receive access to telehealth and social services while they self-isolate and recover from COVID-19.

The **Vermont National Guard Essex Alternate Care Facility** at the Champlain Valley Fairgrounds in Essex Junction, and the **Rutland Regional Medical Center COVID-19 Mendon Mountain View site** in Mendon, Vermont are the designated I/R Housing sites for the State Emergency Operations Center statewide housing strategy in Vermont. Read more by following the links below.

- [Vermont National Guard Essex Alternate Care Facility Referral Guide](#)
- [RRMC COVID-19 Mendon Mountain View Referral Guide](#)
 - [RRMC Mendon Mountain View Referral Form](#)
 - [RRMC Mendon Mountain View/VNA & Hospice of the Southwest Region Notice of Information Practices](#)
 - [RRMC Mendon Mountain View/VNA & Hospice of the Southwest Region Consent Form](#)
 - [RRMC Mendon Mountain View Guest Agreement](#)

[Transportation Guidelines to COVID-19 Isolation and Recovery Housing](#)

17. If there are many tenants in a building who test COVID+, would VDH consider quarantine for the entire building rather than treating folks individually (i.e., sending them to isolation and/or recovery housing)?

It's difficult to imagine a scenario in which that would be indicated. In addition, individuals are moved to isolation/recovery housing on a voluntary basis.

18. The post office refuses to deliver mail to my building where a person has tested positive for COVID 19, has anyone else experienced that?

Yes, this happened in Essex and the postmaster was contacted and the mail was delivered. There are individual postal workers who are uncomfortable with delivering to buildings, especially where people are congregating in mail area, waiting for the mail to arrive; however, it is required that the post office deliver the mail and was able to resolve this issue by addressing it with the post master.

19. I am worried about some of my residents who may be struggling with mental health issues right now, what are others doing for these folks?

PHA retention specialists or residence coordinators have been reaching out by phone to check in and connect frequently with tenants for whom they are concerned. They have been offering resources, help lines, referrals for telehealth and providing general support by phone.

Please see <https://mentalhealth.vermont.gov/Corona-MH> as well as <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/managing-stress-anxiety.html> for resources on mental health care during the pandemic

20. What do other housing operators suggest helping tenants comply with Stay Home and Stay Safe order from Governor Scott?

- Robo calls to all tenants to provide a phone number for support, resources and questions
- Mailed thank-you notes to all tenants to thank them for staying isolated and encouraging them to continue
- Post signs from the CDC <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/homelessness.html> and VDH encouraging people to take preventive steps to stop the spread of COVID -19. Consider changing these signs every few days to keep tenants engaged and increase the odds that they will read the sign and comply.
- Arrange medication and meal delivery for everyone in the building to help people stay in place and not "out" anyone for being COVID +
- PHAs can't stop gossip but to address stigma and gossip about tenants' COVID status, PHAs can act swiftly to support affected tenants and decrease misinformation and rumors.

21. How do housing operators ensure buildings are appropriately cleaned and sanitized?

Housing operators should frequently clean and sanitize touchpoints in common areas. (i.e., doors, handrails, bathroom surfaces and handles, counters, fridge handles, etc.). Housing operators should use additional staff time (if available). To avoid all maintenance staff being quarantined or sick at the same time, consider rotating staff.

22. How should housing operators handle visitors?

Housing operators are encouraged to limit or restrict non-essential visitors. Housing operators are encouraged to restrict access to common areas such as community rooms and lobbies. However, in all circumstances, housing operators **must ensure that critical nutritional and medical services continue for residents and cannot lock all doors.**

It will be important for property managers to monitor, to the best of their ability, visitation. Housing operators can also create a **Visitor Log** at common lobbies, or in office, that will enable future contact tracing through VDH in the event a resident, staff or visitor tests positive for COVID-19. This may only be possible in high-rise developments, and we understand that with skeleton staffing any logging will likely be voluntary. Housing operators should also encourage residents to log their visitors.

23. What can housing operators do to support tenant food security? Especially for older Vermonters participating in food programs.

Housing operators should work with service providers to ensure that critical resident services continue. In particular, food services such as food pantries or home delivered meals need to continue, but in a safe manner that reduces the risk of virus transmission. This can include visits to a food pantry by appointment to avoid crowding as well as providing meals to older residents in takeout containers to be consumed within their units.

24. What should property management or other staff do if they have had close contact* with a tenant/resident with confirmed COVID 19?

Close contact* for healthcare exposures is defined as follows: a) being within approximately 6 feet (2 meters), of a person with COVID-19 for a prolonged period of time (such as caring for or visiting the patient; or sitting within 6 feet of the patient in a healthcare waiting area or room); or b) having unprotected direct contact with infectious secretions or excretions of the patient (e.g., being coughed on, touching used tissues with a bare hand). **See CDC guidance for updates:** <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/guidance-risk-assesment-hcp.html>

Anyone who has had close contact should monitor their health; they should call their healthcare provider right away if they develop symptoms suggestive of COVID-19 (e.g., fever, cough, shortness of breath)

COVID19 QUESTIONNAIRE

To protect everyone's health and well-being during this pandemic, we are asking all tenants to respond to these questions prior to a maintenance visit:

1. In the past 14 days:
 - a. Have you, or someone you live with, traveled outside the State of Vermont? If so, where?
 - b. Have you been in contact with any person who is infected with the novel coronavirus (COVID 19)?
 - c. Have you had any of the following symptoms – cough, high temperature, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing?
 - i. If you have had any of these symptoms, have you been tested for COVID 19? If so, when?
 - ii. If you have not been tested for COVID 19, have you contacted your provider to set up an appointment for this?