



## COVID-19 Resources for Recovery Residences, Residents and Staff Members updated December 1, 2020

This is the fourth update of our COVID-19 guide. This pandemic has been with us for many months, and the current outbreak of cases is higher now (December 2020) than at any time during the crisis. The recommendations below have been collected from a variety of reputable sources, and you are invited to share this document. We've included a few new tips, and some new informative references. NARR and our state affiliates are here to provide support and information during this very difficult time. Together we can survive and thrive.

### Update material:

**NEW: CDC guidelines since last update**, on isolation of COVID-positive individuals: The agency says that individuals who are isolating due to a possible COVID-19 infection should stay away from others until they've gone at least 3 days with no fever, the symptoms have improved, and 10 days have passed since the symptoms first appeared. [See current CDC guidance here.](#)

**Specific CDC guidance for shared and congregate housing** (May 2020) [\[link\]](#) The page includes links to further information for [operators](#), [residents](#), and a [cleaning and disinfecting guide](#).

Guidance has evolved as more has been learned about the disease and how it is transmitted. Changes include masking in the residence, which is different for residents in the same household than for gatherings of individuals from multiple households.

Consider solutions to isolating vulnerable residents that include more than a single residence, including:

If you operate multiple recovery residences, consider designating 'vulnerable resident' homes that might have different rules about guests, activities, etc.

Consider collaborating with other providers to create vulnerable resident homes operated cooperatively.

**A Los Angeles behavioral healthcare law firm** has some good resources online addressing some of the legal issues arising from the COVID-19 crisis. [Info here.](#)

## Background

This virus is highly contagious. From the Centers for Disease Control: "The virus is thought to spread mainly from person-to-person between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet). This occurs through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs." It can be transmitted by individuals who do not have symptoms and the virus can live on surfaces for up to three days. Your hands can pick up the virus from contaminated surfaces, and you can become infected if you then touch your mouth, nose or eyes without first washing your hands.

Symptoms include fever, cough, and difficulty breathing. Although symptoms are mild for many, the virus is fatal for some. Factors increasing risk of adverse or deadly reactions are age, compromised immune system, heart or lung disease, and other indicators of poor general health.

## Sources for accurate and helpful information

The **Centers for Disease Control** is a primary information source on COVID-19 and national developments. This [introductory page and topic index](#) leads to background on the virus and disease, informational posters, news updates, and information on protecting us and the people we serve.

The **U.S. Chamber of Commerce** also has good material for residence providers and staff members beginning with this [overview page](#), and this [resources page](#) .

**SAMHSA's** [Tips For Social Distancing, Quarantine, And Isolation During An Infectious Disease Outbreak](#) includes reminders about maintaining emotional health and addressing fear, loneliness and other negative feelings that arise in these circumstances.

The **National Council for Behavioral Health** has issued [guidance for residential behavioral health facilities](#) of all kinds. While most of the guidance is written with clinical facilities in mind it contains many suggestions that non-clinical residences should follow as well.

You should also review information provided by the **Department of Public Health** or equivalent agency in your state. County and city health departments will also have timely information about local resources, business closures, rules about events, etc.

Online meetings are now plentiful in response to social distancing requirements, the closure of many meeting locations, and the cessation of other community activities. In addition to information provided by national recovery support fellowships and local recovery community organizations, [InTheRooms.com](#) is a directory of online meetings for many 12-step fellowships and other activities. Many of these meetings have existed for years, and welcome new participants. The home page includes an always-current list of upcoming meetings with connection information. They feature phone and video meetings and a new section on coping with the current situation.

Several statewide NARR affiliate organizations have also produced guidance. An index to that material appears at the end of this document.

## Recommendations for residents and staff members

The following precautions are recommended by public health experts and are particularly relevant to individuals sharing living quarters or working in residential settings.

- Precautions are important not only for your own protection but also for the protection of those with whom you come in contact – many of whom are at elevated risk from this virus. You can become a carrier and transmit the disease to others without being aware that you have been exposed to the virus.
- Maintain a safe distance from others – six feet or more is recommended. Replace handshakes and hugs with other forms of greeting that do not involve person-to-person contact.

- Do not assume someone is virus-free just because they do not have symptoms. Some infected individuals never exhibit symptoms but can transmit the disease. Lack of widespread testing means limited reliable information about local community risks.
- Avoid touching your face with unwashed/unsanitary hands to avoid transferring the virus to your nose, mouth or eyes and increasing the likelihood of infection.
- Wash your hands frequently and thoroughly (at least 20 seconds) with soap and hot water when available. Do this as soon as possible after touching surfaces that could be contaminated.
- Use hand sanitizer if washing hands is impractical after touching surfaces that may have been contaminated. Check with your residence's management before buying it for yourself since it contains alcohol and restrictions on possession may apply.
- Cough or sneeze into a tissue, or into your elbow/sleeve if tissues are not available.
- If you have symptoms consistent with COVID-19 call your doctor or health care provider, or a local public health resource if you do not have a doctor. Do not go to an emergency room or clinic for testing without having made prior arrangements. Doing so risks infecting others.
- Avoid crowds and events where safe distances cannot be maintained. Avoiding unnecessary interaction with others protects you, and it also ensures that you do not transmit the virus to others.
- Do not share dishes, cups, glassware or silverware with others. Follow residence procedures for cleaning those items promptly after use.
- Avoid inviting visitors to the residence. Secure the permission of your housemates and management before extending invitations.
- These circumstances are stressful and destabilizing. Self-care is vital, as is staying connected to your program of recovery. Public health precautions include increased physical separation, but that does not mean emotional and interpersonal isolation. Use your phone, text and email to stay connected to others. Skype, Facetime Google Hangouts/Duo, Zoom and other platforms provide connections to others through video chat. If your usual recovery groups are interrupted, seek out alternatives including online meetings.
- Be kind to your housemates. A charitable attitude can go a long way toward helping others who may be struggling.

## Recommendations for residence operators

Share these guidelines with residents. Ask them to help ensure their personal and household safety and health while supporting those who are having a tough time coming to grips with our new reality.

- Disinfect surfaces regularly. This is in addition to standard cleaning, and includes countertops, bathroom fixtures, faucets, doorknobs, railings, and any surfaces or equipment that are touched regularly.
- Ensure that you have appropriate cleaning and containment supplies including disinfectant materials, disposable rubber gloves, facial tissues, etc. See [this Environmental Protection Agency page](#) for products tested by the EPA and found effective against the SARS-CoV-2 virus.
- Have a supply of masks on hand in the event symptomatic or contagious residents need them. Currently masks need only be worn by symptomatic or infected individuals, but that guidance may soon change.

- Use of hand sanitizing gel is a strong public health recommendation when residents can't wash their hands with soap and water. Be aware that these contain alcohol.
- Residents exhibiting symptoms must contact their health care providers. Be sure you know how to connect residents to local medical services if they do not have a doctor or other medical resource of their own.
- Residents with symptoms should be isolated to the greatest extent possible. This may require temporary moves of residents into designated areas within the residence. See below this list for more information on what to do in the event one or more residents need to be isolated.
- It's easy for individuals to slip into old behavior. Consider posting informational messages in public places, [such as these offered by the CDC](#).
- Since many 12-step and other mutual support activities are unavailable, help residents identify suitable substitute activities including online meetings. Groups all over the country are moving online, using Zoom, Skype and ordinary conference call services. A link to one good source is provided above, and more are going online every day.
- With so many outside activities curtailed, residents need to help each other connect to new relationships and recovery activities. Residents can be asked to help quarantined housemates who cannot run errands or otherwise leave the residence.
- Ensure that staff exhibiting symptoms or diagnosed as having COVID-19 do not report to work. Make contingency plans for how staff members' duties will be performed in their absence.
- Symptomatic or ill live-in peer leaders/managers should limit contact with other residents. Make contingency plans for how their duties will be performed during that time.
- Review your resident interview and acceptance process. It is unwise to admit individuals who exhibit COVID-19 symptoms or who have been diagnosed as carrying the virus.
- Restricted commercial activity is creating severe financial problems for providers and for residents. Research and be prepared to guide residents to resources including unemployment, SNAP, and any local programs that might provide financial relief. Many businesses including grocery stores, big box retailers and delivery services are hiring, so be prepared to assist residents in locating those opportunities.
- Monitor local news and public health sources for current information.
- NARR is hosting a weekly COVID-19 call-in for providers, staff members and residents on Wednesdays from 3:30 PM – 5:00 PM eastern time. For more information and instructions for registering for this free series, [see this page](#) on the NARR site.
- For specific questions please contact your state NARR affiliate. Several state affiliates are also hosting regular calls for the providers they support. You can find their contact information on the NARR website.

### *About new residents*

Providers are addressing the potential risks arising from new residents in different ways. Some are limiting new applications due either to staffing issues or from a desire to protect current residents. Others are welcoming new residents provided they are not exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms. Be sensitive to the fact that our current circumstances are likely to drive many more people to seeking recovery, including many who do not have safe places to live. They are our brothers, sisters, parents, children and friends. They need our help too.

### *If a resident must be quarantined*

Many people either diagnosed with COVID-19 or presenting symptoms will need special accommodations, and their residence will need to adopt some new practices. A provider faced with this reality sent us their protocol, which is proving manageable and successful. [You can read it here.](#)

### *Financial Assistance*

Significant financial resources were available for individuals and providers through the CARES Act earlier this year. Congress is currently debating additional relief but details are yet to be finalized, so check frequently with news sources.

### *FEMA disaster assistance*

Several areas of the country have been declared disaster areas, eligible for targeted assistance. FEMA has introduced new guidelines for relief applicants in those areas. More information is [available on the FEMA website.](#)

### *Personal protective equipment*

Federal funds have been made available through FEMA to states' emergency management agencies. The program permits front-line organizations to request PPE and supplies directly from the state agency. [See this page](#) on the FEMA site for a listing of your state's emergency management agency contact. A few providers report that they have been successful in obtaining hard-to-get supplies through these sources.

## Great advice from NARR state affiliate organizations, others

Several NARR affiliates have created information for the homes and residents they support. We've collected that information and made it available at the links below. You'll find suggestions here that may not appear above.

We will be adding to this section as we receive more good material, so check back periodically.

### ***Ohio Recovery Housing***

Has provided helpful resources ([see resources here](#)) and has provided best practice guidance for operators ([see guidance here](#)).

### ***Colorado Association of Recovery Residences***

This is a very thorough list of recommendations for residents and providers compiled from CDC, World Health Organization and other sources. [[see it here](#)]

### ***CCAPP***

Our California affiliate, through its Behavioral Health Association of Providers, has compiled a resource list, including webinar content on legislative and financial responses to the crisis. [[see it here](#)]

### ***Connecticut Alliance of Recovery Residences***

Tips collected from sources including Yale School of Medicine [[see it here](#)]

### ***Georgia Association of Recovery Residences***

Set of the most important personal health and safety tips [[see it here](#)]

***Faces & Voices of Recovery***

Good advice for the recovery community generally, with links to CDC and other authoritative sources of information [\[see it here\]](#)

***SAFE Project***

This set of tips, produced by a national recovery support organization, includes timely reminders about communication and connection. [\[see it here\]](#)

**This document will be updated periodically as we receive more information, so check back often.**

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