

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

April 9, 2020

This guidance is subject to change do to the rapidly changing information regarding COVID 19.

This FAQ is intended to provide information for affordable housing operators and property management staff to support their tenants at this time.

First and foremost all housing operators, tenants property managers and service providers should utilize the guidance provided online from the Vermont Department of Health regarding care for residents in group settings <https://www.healthvermont.gov/response/coronavirus-covid-19/long-term-care-and-group-living-settings>. In addition, all Vermonters should visit the CDC website for the most up to date information <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/index.html> which as used as VDH's primary source of guidance.

How do housing operators encourage strategies that will prevent tenants and staff from getting COVID 19?

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.

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.

How should housing operators communicate with tenants and follow social distancing guidance?

Telephone, fax, and email are the preferred modes of communicating with tenants, applicants, and staff. Most appointments should be performed via telephone instead of in-person. Housing operators should also install drop boxes for paperwork that must be physically transmitted.

While we are all practicing social distancing, it is essential to maintain other kinds of contact with residents. This can include daily or weekly calls, setting up video conference calls, and texts. Reaching out by phone or text to every household will provide needed support and an opportunity for residents, particularly those living alone or who are older, to talk with another. This will also provide staff/property managers with a sense of what other needs may need to be addressed.

How should Resident Service Coordinators (RSC) work with tenants at this time?

RSCs will be focusing on ensuring the health and safety of residents figuring out how to do so remotely. Maintaining existing relationships with local service providers and networks will be the best way to know what the available options are locally. Two top priorities are ensuring ongoing food security for residents and to the degree possible decreasing social isolation.

How should housing operators handle visitors?

Many residents will be relying on family, friends, and service providers to help them through this challenging time. 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.

How do housing operators limit or restrict 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. In all circumstances, housing operators **must ensure that critical nutritional and medical services continue for residents and cannot lock all doors.**

Should we limit service providers from visiting the building?

Some social service staff will still have to continue visiting to provide critical nutritional, medical, and personal care services, especially in senior housing. If appropriate, housing operators should discourage other service providers from physically visiting developments, directing them towards remote communications with residents.

What can housing operators do to support tenant food security?

The outreach on food security should be done to all residents, residents who were not food insecure before may now become so. To the degree that you already have relationships in place for food distribution, continue to work with current food providers, including food pantries, and meals on wheels, to ensure that these vital nutritional supports can continue in a manner that

maintains social distancing practices. Work with your local department of health to determine safe food practices. Also, many school systems are continuing to offer food to those who were on free or reduced breakfast/lunch with both pick-up and delivery options.

How do we ensure older Vermonters have access to their 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.

Can we require residents to tell staff/property managers if they are experiencing symptoms of COVID 19?

No. However, for resident and maintenance safety, precautions should be taken in every unit that is being entered. Staff should use proper precautions. When maintenance staff MUST enter a unit for EMERGENCY repairs, the following precautions should be taken:

- Treat each unit as if it is an isolated positive case, and follow CDC social distancing and hygiene protocols at all times.
- Use Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), if available, disposable gloves at a minimum.
- Keep at least 6-8 feet of space from other persons in unit
- Wash hands thoroughly before and after entering unit.
- Keep time in the unit as short as possible without compromising the required emergency repairs.
- Purchase Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for maintenance staff entering units

Housing operators should ask residents to let maintenance know if they are experiencing symptoms of the Coronavirus. You can use this tool to assess symptoms:

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)

What is the protocol for housing operators when someone in the building has a confirmed case of COVID 19?

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.

If the Vermont Department of Health (VDH) determines through tracing procedures that others in the building have likely been exposed, they will contact those 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.

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 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 recommended by the **CDC** 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>.

Is the guidance above different for those who operate Single Room Occupancy (SRO) buildings or other residences with shared bathrooms?

In buildings with shared bathrooms, the guidance above should be followed. However, 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.

In addition, SROs should increase the rate at which cleaning and sanitizing takes place see:

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

Why are housing operators not getting the information that a person has been diagnosed with COVID-19 and should be quarantined?

If the Vermont Department of Health (VDH) determines through tracing procedures that others in the building have likely been exposed, they will contact those individuals directly and instruct them on what to do.

How can we encourage social distancing?

Close all common rooms, however, housing operators must allow continued access to laundry facilities/ Housing operators should post prominent signage discouraging residents from gathering in groups larger than two for extended periods of time. Housing operators communication to residents should discourage informal gatherings of any kind, and provide appropriate social distancing recommendations.

What do we do in lobbies/other areas we cannot close off?

Open community rooms should be disinfected at least twice daily.

This document was adapted from Commonwealth of Massachusetts DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT available: <https://www.mass.gov/doc/2020-11-operational-guidance-for-covid-19/download>

More information about Harbor Place: AHS has contracted with Harbor Place to serve as Isolation and Quarantine (I & Q) Housing. For more information on this concept visit [CDC](#) website. In this role, Harbor Place, is responsible for housing and supporting the basic needs of individuals suspected of having COVID 19.

Specifically, Harbor Place is serving those who

1. are symptomatic and suspected of having COVID 19 but do not require hospital care; and/or
2. have been exposed to COVID 19 and have been assessed as high-risk for being COVID 19 + by a medical provider; and
3. have no place to stay and/or cannot stay where they normally reside because risk of contagion to others.

Harbor Place does not take referrals for people who are positive for COVID 19, only those who are suspected of having it and need to self-quarantine.

Individuals who need to stay at Harbor Place are typically coming from congregate settings like homeless shelters or other congregate facilities. They may also be newly homeless.

It is important to note that families should not be separated due to suspected COVID 19. If a parent has been assessed as needing Harbor Place I & Q housing, they should not be separated from their children in order to obtain a suitable place to isolate/quarantine. Harbor Place has several units that are appropriate for families.

How to refer to Harbor Place:

Client/resident will need a referral from one of the following:

- Community Health Centers of Burlington, or

- the UVM Medical Center, or
- a physician or health center outside Chittenden County

Please fill out the referral form (attached) and send:

- A copy of photo ID or, if the guest has no ID, a photo of the guest
- A signed copy of the guest rights and responsibilities, and
- A cell number for the guest if possible via e-mail it to all three of the following email addresses: HPManager@champlainhousingtrust.org; mohler@champlainhousingtrust.org; and etaylor@champlainhousingtrust.org.

The front desk staff will call the referring case manager to confirm that a room is available.

All guests must arrive before 8 p.m. on weekdays and before 7:00 pm. on weekends. Once at Harbor, case managers will check in with the guest to see that their needs are met.

Harbor Place
3164 Shelburne Road, Shelburne, Vermont 05482
Temporary Housing Reservation and Billing Form

To be completed by agency and faxed to (802) 985-0053:

Referring Agency: _____

Head of Household (HH) Name: _____

HH Date of Birth: _____ HH Phone Number (if available): _____

of Adults in Household

of Children in Household:

Ages of Children:

Service Animal? Yes No

Check-In Date: _____

Check-Out Date: _____

Staff Person Authorizing Stay: _____

Case Management Services To Be Provided By: _____

Case Manager Contact Information: _____ Phone _____ E-Mail _____

Payment Method:

_____ Client Self-Pay (agency check, cash, money order or credit card) _____ Bill to Agen

Call (802) 316-7112 to confirm room availability.

To be completed by Champlain Housing Trust and returned to Staff Person Authorizing Stay

For guest(s) above:

Check-In Date: _____ Check-Out Date: _____

Reason for Check-Out: _____ End of Authorized Stay Violation of Guest Rules

_____ Other (specify)

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?