

FAQ for Homeless Shelters

How do I request non-medical supplies?

- If you need supplies to respond to the COVID-19 outbreak, MEMA may be able to help.
- MEMA may be able to provide gloves, hand sanitizer, cleaning supplies, and other COVID-19 related products to shelters who do not have access to supplies.
- Please contact your community's emergency management director (EMD) if you have urgent supply needs.

How far apart should the beds/cots be spaced?

Sleeping areas (beds/cots) should be spaced at least 6 feet apart from each other, with individuals sleeping head-to-toe. Individuals exhibiting respiratory symptoms, or a fever should not sleep in the same room as other individuals.

What are guidelines related to social distancing in a shelter environment?

We understand that social distancing in the shelter environment can be very difficult. To the extent possible, shelters should aim to keep guests at least 6 feet apart and should reinforce frequent handwashing practices. Hand sanitizer and/or soap should be placed in accessible locations. Waste baskets should be placed in visible locations and emptied regularly. Tissues should be made available so that individuals can cover their coughs and throw away the tissue.

What is the difference between quarantine and isolation?

Quarantine is for individuals who have been exposed to others with COVID-19, but who are not exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms themselves and have not tested positive for COVID-19.

Isolation is for individuals who are exhibiting symptoms of illness (e.g., fever, cough, shortness of breath) or who have tested positive for COVID-19.

If an individual at a shelter is showing symptoms or has a fever, what are my next steps?

If an individual at a shelter has respiratory symptoms and/or a fever, immediately isolate them from other guests and staff, ideally in a separate enclosed room. Then send them to the closest appropriate medical facility for evaluation.

How do I get testing for individuals at my shelter?

Shelter providers are encouraged to reach out to their local community health center to obtain testing for shelter residents.

Alternatively, a list of testing sites is located here: <https://www.mass.gov/doc/ma-covid-19-testing-sites/download>.

What do I do if one or more of my shelter guests has tested positive for COVID-19?

If one of your guests has tested positive for COVID-19, they need to be isolated from all other guests. If you have an isolation solution (e.g., a separate tent, room, or floor of your shelter where COVID-19 positive individuals are staying), they may be isolated there. This area cannot be used simultaneously for healthy or quarantining individuals. If you (and/or your city or town) do not have a safe location for the shelter guest to isolate, they may stay at an Isolation and Recovery Site.

Guests who have been exposed to the COVID-19 positive individual should then be quarantined from non-exposed guests, either in a separate quarantine site or in a quarantine tent, room, or floor.

What do you recommend for PPE for the staff at these sites?

Shelter staff should wear gloves while on site. For shelters with quarantine solutions (such as quarantine tents or separate quarantine rooms/floors), staff should wear gloves and a surgical mask.