

COVID-19: Home Visit Considerations for City Agencies That Have Staff who Provide Counseling or Other Services That Necessitate Prolonged, Close Contact (Where Visits Can Be Rescheduled)

This guidance is intended to provide city agencies with information and considerations for staff members who perform home visits where the visit can be re-scheduled or phone/virtual communication can replace the home visit. It provides general safety and health guidance in relation to coronavirus disease (COVID-19). This guidance is not intended for staff who perform visits to households that do not necessitate close contact (e.g., equipment inspections).

COVID-19

For general information on COVID-19, including how to guard against stigma, visit nyc.gov/coronavirus. For real-time updates, text “COVID” to 692-692. Message and data rates may apply.

Safety and Health Considerations for City Agencies With Staff That Perform Home Visits

Based on the current COVID-19 scenario, City agencies that have staff who perform home visits should have staff: (1) call ahead to confirm a home visit, if applicable and (2) on the day of the visit:

- (a) Ask the client if anyone in the household has a fever, cough, shortness of breath or sore throat (on day of visit, ask the question before entering the home).
- (b) If the client says yes to (a), staff can politely ask them for their availability to reschedule when they or their household member are feeling better. This should be seven days after symptoms started or three days after fever has stopped without the use of fever-reducing drugs, such as Tylenol and ibuprofen, and their respiratory symptoms have improved, whichever is longer.
- (c) Otherwise, arrange for a phone consult/meeting (if program’s policies allow). The client should also be advised to consult with their medical provider if they do not feel better after three to four days about the symptoms and duration since onset.

General Infection Prevention Strategies

City agency staff performing home visits are always encouraged to routinely employ infection prevention strategies to reduce transmission of common respiratory viruses (e.g., influenza or the common cold).

- Stay home if you are sick.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve when sneezing or coughing. Do not use your hands.

- Do not touch your eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands.
- Do not shake hands. Instead, wave.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Monitor your health more closely than usual for cold or flu symptoms.
- Create more personal space between yourself and others. This is called social distancing.

We strongly encourage you to use these infection prevention strategies routinely, especially washing your hands often with soap and water. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers are also effective.

Face Masks for Non-Health Care Workers

In line with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Health Department does not recommend the routine use of masks if you are not sick. At this time, face masks are not warranted for general/routine tasks by staff — even those who have frequent interaction with the general public. Individuals may wear face masks for many reasons, including seasonal allergies, pollution or have been directed by their health care provider to do so. In addition, some staff may be required to use either face masks or N95 respirators depending on the type of job activity, or per their organization's protocol for reasons unrelated to the current COVID-19 outbreak. If so, such staff should use face masks or N95 respirators as usual.

If Staff Feel Sick

- **If you have mild to moderate symptoms, stay home. You should not seek medical care or try to get tested.** By staying home, you reduce the possibility of transmission to others, including health care workers who are needed to care for the more seriously ill.
- If you are 50 years of age or older or have chronic conditions, consult your doctor. They may want to monitor you more closely.
- If your symptoms do not go away or get worse after three to four days, consult with your doctor.
- If you go out to see your doctor, wear a face mask if available. If possible, take a private car, sit in the back seat and roll down the window.
- If you have more severe symptoms, such as difficulty breathing and very high fever, go to an emergency department. Call **911** if you need help right away.

Self-Monitor

Self-monitoring means you check yourself for fever and remain alert for cough, shortness of breath or sore throat. It is really important that people who have these symptoms stay home and do not attend work or any group gatherings.

Most illness caused by coronavirus is mild. If you think you have COVID-19 and your illness is mild, you do not need to see your doctor and you **do not** need to get tested. This is because getting tested will not change how your doctor will take care of you. If you do not feel better in three to four days, consult with your provider.

You should consult with your doctor if you:

- Have fever, cough, shortness of breath or other cold or flu-like symptoms and do not feel better after three to four days. Use telephone, text, telemedicine or a patient portal to reach out rather than going to your doctor in person.
- Develop symptoms and are 50 years of age or older or have an underlying health condition (such as chronic lung disease, heart disease, diabetes, cancer or a weakened immune system). They may want to monitor you more closely.

You and your provider will decide if you need to come to medical care. You do not need to be tested unless you are admitted to the hospital. If it is not an emergency and you need help finding a health care provider, **call 311**.

Seek Help

An infectious disease outbreak such as COVID-19 can be stressful for you, your loved ones and your friends. It is natural to feel overwhelmed, sad, anxious and afraid, or to experience other symptoms of distress, such as trouble sleeping. To lower your stress and manage the situation:

- Try to stay positive
- Remind yourself of your strengths
- Stay connected with friends and loved ones
- Use healthy coping skills

NYC Well

If symptoms of stress become overwhelming for you, you can connect with trained counselors at NYC Well, a free and confidential mental health support service that can help New Yorkers cope. NYC Well staff are available 24/7 and can provide brief counseling and referrals to care in over 200 languages. For support, call 888-NYC-WELL (888-692-9355), text "WELL" to 65173 or chat online by visiting nyc.gov/nycwell.

You can also visit nyc.gov/nycwell and click on their [App Library](#) to find apps and online tools to help you manage your health and emotional well-being from home.

If you are thinking about harming yourself or someone else, contact NYC Well or call **911** immediately.