

COVID-19: Safety and Health Guidance for NYC Agency Staff who Perform Home Visits (Time Sensitive or Emergency Visits)

*This guidance is intended for NYC agency consideration for their staff who perform home visits where the visit **cannot** be rescheduled (or be done by phone) as it is a time-sensitive, critical activity or emergency situation during the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak. Examples include certain enforcement activities (e.g. home removals). This guidance also provides information for those who conduct emergency/urgent repairs that cannot be rescheduled as well as census takers and others who visit homes but where home entry is not necessary.*

At the time of issuing this guidance, there is a critical shortage of personal protective equipment (PPE). We must preserve PPE for health care workers providing medically necessary care. As PPE stockpile supplies in NYC are extremely limited, they must be released based on strict criteria to preserve health care functions.

As such, nonessential use of PPE should not be allowed. Even where, under normal circumstances, non-health care use may be determined by risk assessment as recommended, such supplies may not be available or will strain use for health care purposes that supports mitigating the catastrophic effects of this pandemic. Social distancing and other administrative controls (e.g., decreasing/eliminated non-urgent visits, reassignments for those at most risk for severe illness from COVID-19, etc.) should be prioritized wherever possible over PPE use. Visit [cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/ppe-strategy](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/ppe-strategy) for strategies to optimizing PPE supply. Although for health care, the Crisis Capacity Strategies listed — especially where no PPE is available — can be evaluated for feasibility.

COVID-19

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

Guidance for Agencies that May Perform Home Enforcement Activities (e.g. Home Removals)

Generally, enforcement workers do not need special precautions beyond those already used to protect workers from the hazards they encounter during their routine job tasks. However, it is important that staff assess field situations that may warrant additional precautionary measures beyond this guidance.

Pre-Planning

- Before arrival, if there is reason to believe that someone is ill with COVID-19, interactions that involve face-to-face/close contact may warrant the following PPE:
 - Face mask
 - Disposable gown or coverall*

- Disposable gloves
- Eye protection (disposable face shield or goggles)

*If unable to wear a disposable gown or coverall because it limits access to gear, ensure gear is disinfected after contact with individual. Factors for consideration include the duration of exposure (e.g., longer exposure time likely increases exposure risk), symptoms of the patient (e.g., coughing likely increases exposure risk) and whether the individual with COVID-19 was wearing a face mask (which can efficiently block respiratory secretions from contaminating others and the environment).

Provisions for hand sanitizer use should be pre-planned if soap and water may not be readily available or availability is unknown. Provision of face masks to others who may be sick and need to be escorted or in close contact should be considered as well.

Before Entry

- Ask if anyone in the household is feeling ill (if feasible and based on the situation). If someone is ill, before entry consider doing the following:
 - Put on a face mask.
 - Put on a gown or disposable coverall.
 - Wear protective eyewear.
 - Wear single-use gloves.
- Where feasible, staff can politely ask that sick individuals:
 - Wear a face mask.
 - Maintain 6-foot distance at all times until they have left the home.

For Non-Law Enforcement Activities that May Be Time-Sensitive and Require Close, Prolonged Contact

Ask if anyone in the household is feeling ill (if feasible and based on the situation).

- If yes, staff should follow their City agency's standard protocols for conducting home visits for households with sick individuals. The staff member should consider the following:
 - Request that sick individuals in the household wear a face mask (if feasible).
 - Request that they maintain at least 6-foot distance (if feasible).
 - Request that household members who are sick move into a separate room for the duration of the visit.
 - Maintain a distance of 6 feet from all persons in the residence.
 - If possible, conduct the interaction outside the residence — while maintaining a distance of 6 feet.
 - If prolonged close contact cannot be avoided with a sick individual, before entry, the staff member should:
 - Carry and use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
 - Put on a face mask.
 - If **direct** patient/client contact is needed, consider the following:
 - Wear single-use gloves.

- Put on a disposable gown and eye protection (if handling patient).

For Home Repairs That Are Time-Sensitive (e.g., Leaking Pipe)

Encourage staff who need to enter a home for urgent repairs that cannot be rescheduled to do the following:

- Ask if anyone in the household is feeling ill (if feasible and based on the situation).
- Staff can politely ask that sick individuals do the following:
 - Where possible, remain in a separate room with the door closed.
 - If a separate room is not available, maintain at least a 6-foot distance from the staff person at all times until they have left the home.
- Carry an alcohol-based hand sanitizer for periodic hand hygiene during visit.
- After visit, staff should wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.

For Activities That May Be Time-Sensitive but Do Not Require Home Entry

Ask if anyone in the household is feeling ill (if feasible and based on the situation).

- If yes, staff should follow their City agency's standard protocols for conducting home visits for households with sick individuals.
- If home entry is not required (for example, census takers) and you can maintain at least 6 feet of distance, indicate that you will not need to enter the home and can perform the activity from the door threshold — or you can call them by phone or provide a phone contact for them to participate in a call.

Safe Personal Protective Equipment Removal

It is important to properly remove PPE.

- Hand sanitizer should be used at the start, between steps and after removing all PPE.
- The sequence of removal is:
 - Perform hand hygiene over gloves then remove and discard.
 - Remove eye protection (face shield) and discard; if using goggles, use a disinfectant wipe to clean.
 - Remove gown/coveralls and discard (i.e., if this was worn).
 - Remove face mask and discard.
 - Perform hand hygiene immediately for 20 seconds with soap and water. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.

Refer to NYC Health Department document [“Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)-Safety and Health Guidance for Non-Healthcare Workers Working for NYC Government”](#) for other considerations.

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.** (Make sure to monitor your health daily and before each shift).
- 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.

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 doctor.

You should consult with your doctor if you:

- Have a 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 get 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.