

COVID-19 PUBLIC HEALTH GUIDANCE FOR SHELTERS

The Ministry of Health's recently released [COVID-19 Guidance for Homeless Shelters](#) is a comprehensive document providing valuable guidance for the sector and we encourage its implementation in Simcoe Muskoka. Select points are highlighted here, but **please refer to the full Ministry of Health document for details**. *Notes in italics are additions made by the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit (SMDHU)*. Key points are summarized in a graphic at the end.

PREVENTION

- Facilitate proper hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette, and physical distancing in the shelter.
- In addition to routine cleaning, surfaces that have frequent contact with hands should be [cleaned and disinfected](#) twice per day and when visibly dirty.

SCREENING

- Undertake active ([ask screening questions](#)) and passive ([signage](#)) screening. Screening should be done on intake and daily for staff, volunteers and clients for:
 - *Fever (if possible – i.e. non-oral thermometer – temperature of 37.8°C or greater) or chills;*
 - *Any new/worsening cold-like symptom (e.g. cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, runny nose or sneezing, nasal congestion, hoarse voice, muscle aches, headache, etc.) or digestive symptom (e.g. nausea/vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal pain).*
- On intake, clients should be screened for exposures to individuals who are unwell and may have COVID-19.

POSITIVE SCREENING

- Staff and volunteers who become unwell on site at the shelter should be sent home.
- Symptomatic staff, volunteers and clients in shelters are included in priority groups for COVID-19 testing in Ontario. They should advise health care workers (e.g. at an Assessment Centre or elsewhere) that they use or work in a shelter.
- If a client becomes unwell while in the shelter:
 - Instruct the client to wear a surgical/procedure mask (*if available*) and use alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Place the client in a room with the door closed or in an isolated area to try to keep them away from other clients.
 - **Call SMDHU's Infectious Diseases Team at 705-721-7520 ext. 8809.** They will help coordinate client assessment and testing, and provide further guidance to the shelter as warranted.
 - *If a surgical mask is not available then a homemade mask can be used to provide some protection to others.*
- If a client is awaiting test results:
 - Any client that has been tested will need to be isolated alone if possible, or grouped (cohorted) with others who have been tested and are awaiting test results *and with each client wearing a surgical/procedure mask if available.*
 - *Individuals can access test results [online](#).*
 - *Potential barriers to accessing online results for shelter clients:*
 - a) **Internet Access:** *Clients who don't have access to internet/computer can provide consent to Shelter Operations to access online results on their behalf.*
 - b) **Access to Identification:** *Clients may have difficulty accessing their results online if missing key pieces of identification (i.e. health card, postal code). County of Simcoe Social Services and the District of Muskoka Community and Social Services can assist with obtaining this information if the client is already getting any supports from Social Services.*

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- If a client is positive for COVID-19 and does not require hospital care:
 - Any client that has tested positive for COVID-19 needs to be isolated in a private room with a dedicated bathroom, or can share a room with others who have also tested positive (cohorting).
 - *Isolation will need to continue for 14 days from the day the symptoms started, and until SMDHU advises the client can come out of isolation.*
- *For all of the above scenarios, the client should wear a surgical mask at all times if they need to leave their room for needs that cannot be met within their room – e.g. if testing can't be arranged on site or if they need to go outside for a cigarette and Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT) is not acceptable (only remove the mask when outside and more than 2 metres (6 feet) away from anyone; if desired, NRT can be obtained via SMDHU, etc.*
- For all of the above scenarios, in addition to routine cleaning, surfaces that have frequent contact with hands should be cleaned and disinfected twice per day and when visibly dirty.

REPORTING OF POSITIVE SCREENING

- Shelter staff should contact **SMDHU's Infectious Diseases Team at 705-721-7520 ext. 8809** to report a staff member, volunteer or client suspected to have COVID-19. SMDHU will provide specific advice on what control measures should be implemented to prevent further spread in the shelter, and how to monitor for other possible infected clients, volunteers and staff.

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

- Advise all staff and volunteers to stay home or go home if they are unwell.
- If they have any new/worsening cold-like or digestive symptoms, they should go to a local [Assessment Centre](#) for assessment and testing.
 - They are asked to stay home until 14 days have passed from the start of their symptoms, *unless they have a negative test (in which case, they are to stay home until 24 hours after symptoms resolve)*. This may impact staffing levels but is a precaution to prevent spread of illness in the shelter and community.

PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE): *(compiled from all sections of the provincial document)*

- *PPE use varies depending on each situation. The following outlines how and when to use PPE within the shelter setting.*
- Optimizing the use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) within the shelter:
 - Shelter staff must be trained on the safe use, care and limitations of PPE, including the [donning \(putting on\) and doffing \(taking off\) of PPE](#) as well as proper disposal.
 - Gloves should be removed first, and hand hygiene should be performed immediately after removing gloves. The mask should then be removed, and hand hygiene performed again.
 - Masks should only be worn inside the shelter if a staff person must have direct contact (less than 2 metres) with an unwell client. Administrative areas and administrative tasks that do not involve contact with a client with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 do not require the use of PPE.
- PPE is recommended for staff/volunteers in the following situations:
 - **Screening:** Masks and gloves are only required when screening staff, volunteers and clients at the door if no physical barrier (e.g. Plexiglas) is available to separate the screeners from those entering the shelter. Hand sanitizing should be available.

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- **Direct Care:** Shelter staff should try to maintain physical distance between themselves and unwell clients. If direct care is being provided (less than 2 metres between staff and client), staff should wear appropriate PPE (at a minimum a mask and gloves).
- **Cleaning:** Staff or volunteers doing cleaning, including handling laundry, should wear gloves and gowns.
- Questions regarding procurement of PPE should be directed to:
 - County of Simcoe Social Services – Shelter Lead at 705-722-3132.
 - District of Muskoka Community and Social Services – Shelter Lead at 705-645-2412.

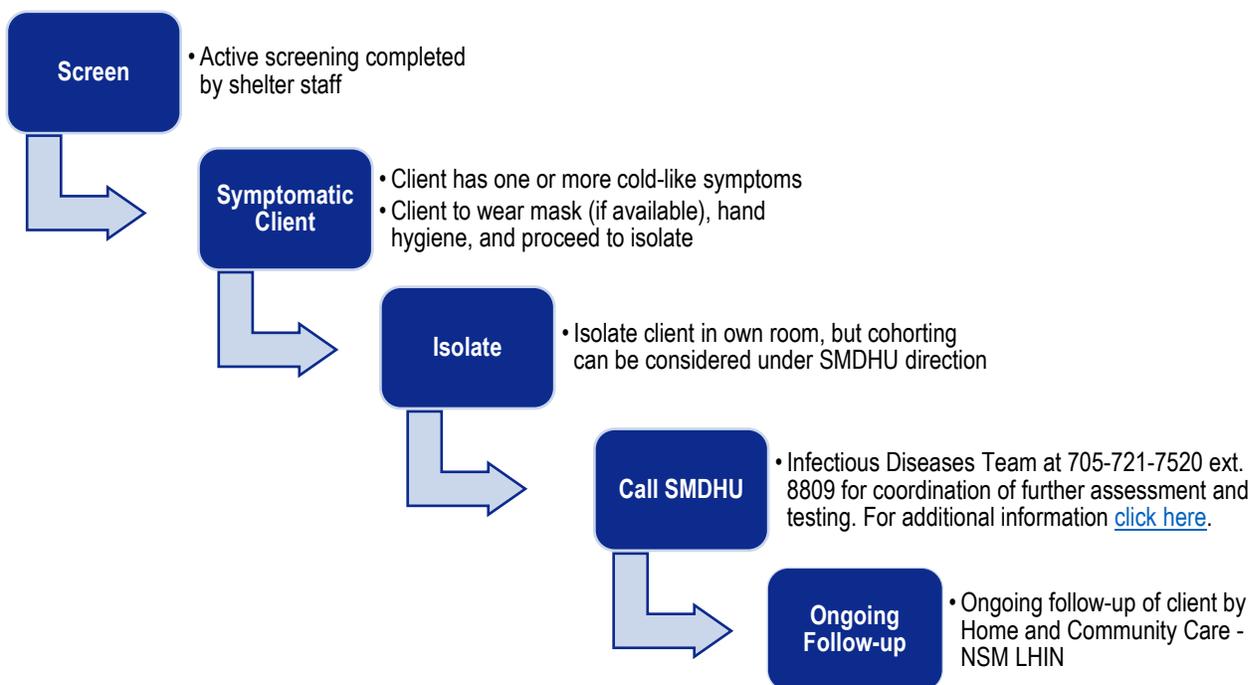
TRANSPORTATION

- If a client has severe symptoms, they should be transported by EMS to the hospital.
- Otherwise, symptomatic clients can be transported in private vehicles; driver should wear a surgical/procedure mask, client should wear a surgical/procedure mask and be placed as far as possible from the driver with the window open, and surfaces that have been touched by the unwell client should then be cleaned and disinfected.

FOOD PREPARATION

- Shelters should reinforce routine food safety and sanitation practices. As much as possible, implement measures to minimize client handling of shared food and utensils.

PROCESS FOR MANAGING SYMPTOMATIC CLIENTS IN SHELTERS IN SIMCOE AND MUSKOKA



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