



Guidelines for Continuity Planning and Best Practice by Provider Agencies in Response to COVID-19

With concerns about COVID-19 (the coronavirus) on the rise, the Division of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) would like all contracted Provider Agencies to consider the following guidance.

Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a respiratory disease caused by a new virus that first emerged in December 2019 and has since spread to many countries, including the United States. While health officials have more to learn about how COVID-19 is spread, it is believed that COVID-19 is primarily transmitted through respiratory droplets when a person coughs or sneezes, much like the flu.

STAY INFORMED

It is important to review the most up-to-date guidance from national, state, and local public health agencies. Many townships and local health departments have ways to sign up for news alerts. Individuals can also use these public health agency websites and hotlines:

- **NJ Department of Health:** www.nj.gov/health/cd/topics/ncov.shtml
24-Hour Hotline: 1-800-222-1222
- **Contact for all Local Health Departments in NJ:** <http://localhealth.nj.gov>
- **U.S. Centers for Disease Control & Prevention:** www.cdc.gov/COVID19

Staying informed can help decrease the anxiety people may feel about COVID-19. It can also help prevent the spread of rumors and discourage the stigma and exclusionary behavior that can occur with COVID-19 or any other infectious diseases.

PRACTICE BASIC PREVENTION MEASURES

Follow these basic preventive measures at home, work, and program settings:

- Hand washing and disinfecting of frequently used surfaces are two of the most important things that we can all do to protect ourselves and prevent the spread of the disease.
 - Wash hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially before eating; after going to the bathroom; and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
 - When soap and water are unavailable, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.

- Review the CDC's detailed recommendations for homes, healthcare facilities and other settings: <https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/when-how-handwashing.html>
- Clean and disinfect frequently used surfaces and objects using EPA SARS-CoV-2 approved products, following label instructions on use and contact time: <https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2>
- Avoid touching eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Cover nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing, and then throw the tissue into a trashcan. Wash hands after doing this.
- Review the CDC's guidance on what to do if you have a respiratory infection, like COVID-19 or the flu, or are in contact with an individual who does: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/index.html>

GUIDELINES FOR ALL CONTRACTED DMHAS PROVIDERS

The CDC provides interim guidance for businesses and employers. Review this information for relevance to your organization. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-business-response.html>

Communication and Organizational Preparedness

- Review and update agency Continuity of Operation Plans (COOP).
- Review policies and procedures for emergency situations that might be relevant to COVID-19, and implement as appropriate.
- Review and complete attached readiness checklist as an internal planning tool.
- Establish communication strategies for contacting consumers/clients/ and families (as appropriate). Please be reminded that any communications with family members must be in accordance with federal and state confidentiality laws and regulations.
- Consider alternative site locations as needed. Consult Department of Health, Certificate of Need and Licensing to determine if alternative site is allowable.
- Communicate any programmatic changes to staff at DMHAS, the Interim Managing Entity (IME), County Mental Health Administrator and/or County Alcohol and Drug Abuse Director, as appropriate. Consult Department of Health, Certificate of Need and Licensing regarding any programmatic changes.
- Continue to follow current DHS and DMHAS incident reporting procedures.

Staff-related

- Keep staff informed of health maintenance/prevention strategies and agency plans for service delivery
- Review current staffing to determine essential functions and staff requirements to ensure appropriate qualifications to serve as on-call professionals for programs that need to remain operational with reduced staff.
- To the extent possible, cross-train staff so that qualified staff can serve in different capacities.
- Re-visit and consider any temporary policies/provisions to allow staff to work from home, for functions that do not require on-site staff presence.

- For providers that have bargaining units, review contract language in regard to overtime and re-assignment of staff in the event of business continuity needs and/or emergencies.

Health/Prevention-related

- Review and follow CDC recommendations for what to do if a person exhibits symptoms <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/healthcare-facilities/guidance-hcf.html>
- Keep adequate supply of cleaning products, masks and gloves, as applicable.
- Facilitate educational meetings to discuss the importance of preventative measures with staff and (where appropriate) consumers/clients.
- Post illustrated information sheets about hand washing and other preventive measures.
- Review sick leave policies. Reinforce the policy that staff who have cold or flu-like symptoms must stay home.
- Encourage staff to follow and serve as role-models for good hygiene practices.

Consumer/Client-related

- Contact all consumers/clients and family members (when appropriate) to update phone numbers, addresses, emergency contacts, releases of information, prescriber information, etc. Please be reminded that any communications with family members or emergency contacts must be in accordance with federal and state confidentiality laws and regulations.
- Update medical history and current medication information when speaking with consumers/clients and family members (when appropriate). Please be reminded that any communications with family members must be in accordance with federal and state confidentiality laws and regulations.
- Create a tiered list of all consumers/clients. Identify those individuals who have a low, medium and/or high risk for behavioral health concerns/crisis in the event staffing is limited and services must be triaged.
- Review and/or expand agency resources to ensure that back-up plans are in place to communicate with consumers/clients who are non-English speaking and Deaf or hard of hearing.
- Review with every consumer/client the importance of having sufficient non-perishable food and other necessary supplies as well as activities for at least 14 days in the event social distancing is required.
- Review with every consumer/client the importance of having sufficient medications and medical supplies for at least 14 days in the event social distancing is required. Also be sure that prescriber has provided sufficient prescriptions for this to be possible.

ADDITIONAL GUIDELINES FOR AMBULATORY SERVICE PROVIDERS

- Consider how staff can carry on routine services and maintain contact with external resources.

ADDITIONAL GUIDELINES FOR RESIDENTIAL SERVICE PROVIDERS

- Review and follow CDC guidelines for infection control
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/healthcare-facilities/steps-to-prepare.htm>
- Review and follow your agency's policies and procedures regarding a contagious outbreak (e.g. measles or the flu).
- Evaluate levels of food, specialized food products and dietary supplements. Each location, as appropriate for its operation, will need to ensure an adequate supply of food. Inventory items like canned goods and other shelf-stable foods, and determine whether more should be purchased. Based on the needs of the individual, ensure there is an adequate supply of other food items.
- Check to ensure that refills are available on prescription medications. If refills are needed, contact the individual's doctor to request. Do not overlook items that may have expiration dates, like epi-pens and diabetic supplies. Identify alternate vendors for obtaining prescription and over-the-counter medications if relationships with established vendors become strained or disrupted.
- Evaluate levels of medical equipment and supplies. These are items like disinfectant, soap, clean towels/paper towels and alcohol-based hand sanitizer (60% or higher). Know what you have on hand and have a plan to obtain more when needed. Pay special attention to items that may be reaching the end of their shelf life. Do not forget to ensure a working thermometer is readily available. Identify alternate vendors for obtaining supplies if relationships with established vendors become strained or disrupted.
- Communicate with the applicable state hospital, DMHAS Olmstead and regional staff if access to a facility needs to be restricted, causing any referrals in process and Brief Visits being scheduled to be affected.