Preventing the Spread of COVID-19 in Homelessness Service Settings

What is COVID-19

- COVID-19 is the disease caused by the 2019 novel coronavirus
- Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that can cause illness ranging from the common cold to more serious respiratory infections
- It is estimated that 80% of people infected with COVID-19 have mild to moderate respiratory symptoms
- People over 70 years of age and immunocompromised individuals are at the highest risk for developing severe disease

The Basics: How COVID-19 is Spread and How to Protect Yourself

From person to person via respiratory droplets
- Maintain a distance of 2 metres between all individuals when possible, especially those who are symptomatic

From person to person via prolonged personal contact, such as touching
- Maintain a distance of 2 metres between all individuals when possible, especially those who are symptomatic
- Maintain proper hand hygiene

From touching a contaminated object, then touching your mouth, nose or eyes
- Maintain proper hand hygiene
- Limit hand-to-face contact

In Depth: How to Protect Yourself from COVID-19

To prevent and control the transmission of microorganisms we must focus on the following principles:

1. Risk Assessment
2. Hand Hygiene
3. Use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)
4. Control of the Environment
5. Administrative Controls
Risk Assessment

- Keep in mind that COVID-19 is spread through droplets from person-to-person and contact with contaminated objects
- Perform a risk assessment before each client interaction:
  - What you will be doing, is there a risk of exposure to the COVID-19 virus?
  - Does the client have symptoms of a respiratory infection?
  - What kind of contact/interaction will you be having with the client?
  - Is there a way to maintain a 2 metre distance with the client during the interaction?
  - Is there a way to avoid contaminating your hands during the interaction?

Hand Hygiene

- Hand hygiene, when done properly, is an effective way to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus
- The COVID-19 virus can cause infection when contaminated hands come into contact with the mouth, nose and eyes
- Hand hygiene should be promoted between both staff and clients
- When to perform hand hygiene:
  - Before touching your face
  - Before preparing, handling, serving and eating food
  - After using the washroom
  - After contact with body substances, mucous membranes of the eyes, nose and mouth and non-intact skin
  - Before putting on and taking off PPE
  - Before and after client contact
  - After touching 'regularly touched' items such as door knobs, toilets and sink taps
  - Whenever there is a chance that your hands may have been contaminated!
- Two ways to perform hand hygiene:
  - Handwashing
    - When hands are visibly soiled or feel sticky
    - Use liquid hand soap and warm running water
    - Lather hands covering all surfaces for 20 seconds including between fingers, tips of fingers and back of hands
    - Rinse with warm running water
    - Dry your hands with a paper towel or a hand dryer
    - Refer to 'handwashing' poster
  - Alcohol Based Hand Rub (Hand Sanitizers)
    - Minimum concentration of alcohol should be 60%
    - When hands are not visibly soiled
    - Rub into hands covering all surfaces including between fingers, tips of fingers and back of hands
    - Rub into hands for a minimum of 20 seconds or until dry
    - Refer to 'how to use hand rub' poster
Use Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

- Deciding to use PPE is based on your risk assessment of the situation
  - **Ask yourself: What you will be doing, is there a risk of exposure to the COVID-19 virus?**
- PPE should not be worn when it is not needed
- Social distancing at 2 metres and proper hand hygiene will be the most important way to protect yourself from the COVID-19 virus
- Improper use of PPE can create a false sense of confidence, increase chances of infection and waste supply
- Proper use of PPE is an effective part of infection prevention and control, however it is not a stand-alone method

**Types of PPE you may be using:**

- **Gloves**
  - Should be worn when hands come into contact with symptomatic clients or objects that could be contaminated
  - Should be disposable and single use only - 'one pair for one task'
  - Exercise proper hand hygiene before and after glove use
  - Refer to 'Steps to take off gloves' poster

- **Masks**
  - Face masks are intended to be worn by those who are ill to protect those around them from their respiratory emissions
  - Face masks can protect the wearer from large droplets, splashes or sprays
  - It may be appropriate to wear a face mask if you are within 2 metres of an ill person who is unable to wear a face mask
  - N95 masks are different from the face masks discussed above
  - N95 masks are not required as the COVID-19 virus is spread by droplet transmission NOT airborne transmission
  - N95 masks are intended to protect healthcare personnel that are performing aerosol-generating medical procedures (AGMPs) such as intubation
  - Refer to handout on how to put on a face mask

- **Eye Protection**
  - Eye protection should be used as a precaution if you are within 2 metres of an ill person exhibiting respiratory symptoms
  - Reusable eye protection should be washed and sanitized between each use
  - Eye protection can be disinfected using a low level disinfectant
  - If you need to be within 2 metres
Control of the Environment

- Set up for a minimum of 2 metres distance between client sleeping arrangements
- Set up for head-to-toe client sleeping arrangements
- Regular cleaning and disinfection of sleeping mats
- Regular laundering of sheets
- **Environmental cleaning/disinfecting** of regularly touched items such as toilets, sink tap handles, door knobs at least twice daily
- Commonly used low level disinfectants are effective against the COVID-19 virus
- Follow manufacturer's directions for use
- **Separation** between clients showing respiratory symptoms and clients showing no respiratory symptoms

Administrative Controls

- Do not come to work if you are experiencing respiratory symptoms (in accordance with your workplace policy)
- Have schedules for cleaning and disinfection
- Post educational infection prevention and control materials as a constant reminder to staff and clients