

# Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)

## Los Angeles County Department of Public Health Guidance for Home Visiting Staff

### Recent Updates:

11/27/20: Updated information on spread of COVID-19 and instructions for what to do when sick and if you are a contact.

This guidance is for public health, healthcare and other agencies providing in-home healthcare and other support services. “Home visits” entail clinical or healthcare professional or paraprofessionals visiting the home of a client to perform site-based services, such as case management, client interviews, follow-ups/check-ups, home assessments and/or health audits. By definition, home visits involve person-to-person contact in close quarters. Given community spread of COVID-19 in Los Angeles County, in-person home visits should be avoided except when face-to-face contact is critical to the health or well-being of the client. This guidance is intended to help home visitors determine when home visits can be postponed, when and how alternate strategies can be employed instead of home visits, and how to conduct home visits safely when one is needed.

This guidance includes recommendations that public health and home visiting staff of other departments and organizations can use while the Health Officer’s Safer at Work and in the Community Health Officer Order is in place in Los Angeles County.

Table of Contents		Page #
<b>Keeping yourself and your clients informed</b>		
1. Understand how COVID-19 is spread		1
2. Know the symptoms of COVID-19		2
3. Empower your clients with reliable health information		2
<hr/>		
<b>Practice prevention</b>		
4. Employ “universal” precautions to prevent COVID-19 spread		3
5. Attend to your own health		3
6. Exchange back-up plans with co-workers		3
<hr/>		
<b>Before conducting a home visit</b>		
7. Assess the necessity for a home visit		3
8. Contact the client before a visit		3
9. Screen the client for COVID-19 before visiting		4
<hr/>		
<b>Decide on the best course of action</b>		
10. Is an in-person home visit the right strategy?		4
11. Engage the client in problem-solving		4
12. Select a strategy that can substitute for the home visit		5
<hr/>		
<b>When home visits are necessary in spite of the risk</b>		
13. Mitigate the risk when a visit is conducted		5

# Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)

## Los Angeles County Department of Public Health Guidance for Home Visiting Staff

### KEEPING YOURSELF AND YOUR CLIENTS INFORMED

#### Understand how COVID-19 is spread

- Like other respiratory illnesses, human coronaviruses most commonly spread to others from an infected person through:
  - Droplets produced through coughing, sneezing, and talking
  - Close personal contact, such as caring for an infected person

COVID-19 may also spread by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching the mouth, nose, or eyes but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads. Some people get COVID-19 without ever showing symptoms but they can still spread the infection to others.

#### Know the symptoms of COVID-19

Most people infected with COVID-19 will experience mild or moderate illness and will get better in a week or two without complications. Symptoms in children tend to be milder but some people—mainly older adults and those with underlying health conditions—may become severely ill, require hospitalization and may even die from it.

Symptoms of COVID-19 may include some combination of the following: fever, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, chills, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, nausea or vomiting, diarrhea, or new loss of taste or smell. This list of symptoms is not all inclusive. Some people with COVID-19 never get any symptoms.

If you have symptoms of COVID-19 talk to a healthcare provider and get a test for COVID-19. You should stay home and protect others until you get the result of your COVID-19 test or until your provider tells you that you don't have COVID-19. For more information, visit [ph.lacounty.gov/covidcare](http://ph.lacounty.gov/covidcare).

- If you test negative for COVID-19 using a molecular test or your provider tells you that you don't have COVID-19, stay home until you have been fever-free without the help of fever-reducing medicines for at least 24 hours and have improvement in symptoms.
- If you test positive for COVID-19 or your doctor thinks that you have COVID-19, you must follow the [Home Isolation Instructions](#) closely.

If you develop other symptoms listed above/below or worrying symptoms that are not on the list, please consult your provider.

Older adults, and those with compromised immune systems or underlying medical problems who experience COVID-19 symptoms should call their doctor early. If you are having difficulty breathing, feel pain or pressure in your chest, have bluish lips or face or are experiencing a new onset of confusion or difficulty waking up call 911 or go to an emergency room, otherwise call your doctor before going in to seek care.

# Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)

## Los Angeles County Department of Public Health Guidance for Home Visiting Staff

If you are a close contact to a case of COVID-19 you should follow the [home quarantine instructions](#) closely. A “close contact” is any of the following people who were exposed to a person with COVID-19\*:

- a. An individual who was within 6 feet of the infected person for a total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period.
- b. An individual who had unprotected contact with the infected person’s body fluids and/or secretions, for example, being coughed or sneezed on, sharing utensils or saliva, or providing care without wearing appropriate protective equipment.

\*A person with COVID-19, is considered to be infectious from 2 days before their symptoms first appeared until they are no longer required to be isolated (as described in Home Isolation Instructions for People with COVID-19). A person with a positive COVID-19 test but no symptoms is considered to be infectious from 2 days before their test was taken until 10 days after their test.

### Empower yourself and your clients with reliable health information

- During the pandemic, beware of scams, false news and hoaxes concerning COVID-19.
- Accurate information is available on the DPH coronavirus website.
  - Los Angeles County Department of Public Health (LACDPH, County)
    - <http://ph.lacounty.gov/coronavirus>
- State, federal and international sites also offer reliable information on COVID-19:
  - California Department of Public Health (CDPH, State)
    - <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/Immunization/nCOV2019.aspx>
  - Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, National)
    - <http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/novel-coronavirus-2019.html>
  - World Health Organization (WHO, International)
    - <https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus>
- Beware of scams and fraud surrounding novel coronavirus. Visit Public Health’s COVID-19 scams webpage ([ph.lacounty.gov/hccp/covidscams](http://ph.lacounty.gov/hccp/covidscams)) for information and resources on how to [avoid COVID-19 health care scams](#).
- If you or your client have questions and would like to speak to someone directly, or need help finding medical care, call the Los Angeles County Information Line 211 (press 2 1 1 on any phone), which is available 24 hours a day.

### PRACTICE PREVENTION

#### Employ “universal” COVID-19 precautions to prevent spread

- Wash your hands thoroughly and often. Use soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol for at least 20 seconds.
  - Limit close contact with others and practice physical distancing. Maintain a distance of at least 6 feet from anyone other than a member of your household.
- Routinely clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using regular household cleaning spray or wipes.

# Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)

## Los Angeles County Department of Public Health Guidance for Home Visiting Staff

- Don't share objects such as utensils, cups, food and drink.
- Avoid skin-to-skin contact (such as shaking hands) with others.
- Wear a cloth face covering whenever you are interacting with those outside of your household, unless you have been told by a medical provider not to use one. Surgical or N95 masks will be needed for home visits with patients as noted below. If you cannot use face coverings or masks, consider whether participating in home visits is feasible for you.

### Attend to your own health

- If you are in a high-risk category for COVID-19 take extra care to avoid close contact with other people. Call your healthcare provider immediately if you become ill.
- If you develop symptoms associated with COVID-19 go home immediately and talk to your healthcare provider about getting tested for COVID-19.

### Exchange back-up plans with co-workers

- Develop contingency plans with your co-workers to ensure continuity of care/services in case you cannot provide the service, and/or a home visit is not feasible.
- Whenever you have to make changes to your home visiting routine, communicate with your colleagues so they can fill in for you as needed.

## BEFORE CONDUCTING A HOME VISIT

### Assess the necessity of a home visit

- Cessation of in-person home visits may be mandated by a funder or authorizing authority. When that occurs, home visiting staff will have to use alternative strategies.
- Given the spread of COVID-19, alternatives to in-person visits are preferable, unless:
  - Program guidance requires the home visit regardless of potential COVID-19 exposure,
  - The client's physical health, safety and/or well-being are at risk or in jeopardy if the visit is not conducted or
  - The client's care requires a direct, physical or "hands-on" assessment.

### Contact the client before a visit

- Use a pre-visit contact to learn if a face-to-face visit is feasible and desirable from the client perspective.
- Use a calm, reassuring voice to ease your client's worries and frustrations. Concerns about COVID-19 and its resulting economic and social effects are stressful. Comforting language and tone can soothe anxiety.
- Use this contact to assess your clients' understanding of COVID-19 before screening them for it. Ask open-ended questions to gauge their COVID-19 knowledge, dispel myths or false information, and clarify any misunderstandings they might have about it.
- Give the client a chance to express fears or concerns about COVID-19. Being able to voice their fears may itself be comforting and it gives you a chance to address misunderstandings.
- After discussing COVID-19, discuss strategies and behaviors that they can adopt (e.g., physical distancing to prevent or slow the spread of COVID-19).

# Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)

## Los Angeles County Department of Public Health Guidance for Home Visiting Staff

### Screen clients for COVID-19 before visiting

- Although it is not common practice to screen clients' health before home visits, screening is necessary while exposure to COVID-19 remains a risk.
- Pre-screen the client by asking if the client or anyone in the client's household has any of the symptoms listed in the box on page 2.
  - Be sure to use language the client can understand and a tone that makes clear you are concerned about the client's well-being.
  - If the client's only symptom is muscle pain, headache or sore throat, make sure it is not due to an ongoing condition.

### DECIDE ON THE BEST COURSE OF ACTION

#### Is an in-person home visit the right strategy?

- If the client is not reachable, not willing to answer your question, or reports having symptoms, follow your program's guidance to determine next steps.
- If screening results in a decision not to conduct an in-person visit:
  - Communicate the decision to hold off on in-person visits with empathy and sensitivity
    - Make sure the client understands that your program cannot risk having you spread COVID-19 to others; the visit is not being canceled due to lack of concern about them. Be careful not to stigmatize the client or the client's family—nor leave them feeling judged or undervalued.
  - Suggest an alternative way to stay in touch

#### Engage the client in problem-solving

- Present various alternative strategies for conducting the home visit—some of which are detailed below—and allow time to discuss the pros and cons of each strategy with the client.
  - Discuss any fears the client has about switching to another form of home visit interaction.
  - Offer to contact them more frequently—especially in the following few days when you have encouraged them to check with their provider about a possible COVID-19 infection. More frequent contact may mitigate the uneasiness they have about not meeting face-to-face.

#### Select a strategy that can substitute for the home visit

- The strategy you choose with the client should be consistent with your program's guidelines and allowances. Here are some options:
  - If the client finds it acceptable and client needs do not necessitate more immediate contact, reschedule the visit(s) for a later time.
  - Arrange to call back at a set time to re-screen the client, re-assess risk and determine if a home visit can be conducted more safely at that point.
  - Schedule frequent client contacts to counter client anxiety absent face-to-face meetings.
  - If program capacity and IT infrastructure allow, and relevant HIPAA, privacy and confidentiality requirements are met, conduct your visits using video-conferencing technology, such as FaceTime, Skype, Teams or other approved visual interface communication platforms.
    - Many programs have adopted telehealth strategies and have relaxed HIPAA requirements for the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic. Check to see if your program has made it easier to

# Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)

## Los Angeles County Department of Public Health Guidance for Home Visiting Staff

video- conference with your clients.

### WHEN HOME VISITS ARE NECESSARY IN SPITE OF THE RISK

#### Mitigate risk when a visit is conducted

- If the client needs immediate healthcare attention, the home visitor should advise the client or the client's family to call 9 1 1 for emergency assistance and tell the dispatcher about any COVID-19 symptoms or exposure. If the health concern is less urgent, they can contact their primary care provider for guidance.
- If a "visual assessment" is needed, then the staff member should do it from outside the house and remain at least 6 feet away from the client.
- When you cannot avoid direct contact with a potentially infectious client, be sure to:
  - Limit time spent close to the client; maintain a distance of at least 6 feet or more if possible.
  - Avoid direct physical contact.
  - Make sure you have a surgical or N-95 mask in place, and have the client wear, at a minimum, a cloth face covering over their mouth and nose.
    - Do not offer a mask to any client with a condition which may make a mask risky, a child under age 2, or a child 2-8 who does not have adequate adult supervision to wear a mask safely.
    - If the client cannot wear a face covering, due to medical issues, while you are interacting with them you should wear a mask and a face shield with a drape at the bottom edge. A drape that is form fitting under the chin is preferred.
  - Wear gloves for any needed physical contact, or when you come in contact with shared surfaces. Wear gloves only one time and then discard and clean your hands.
  - Wash your hands with soap and water for a minimum of 20 seconds after physical contact with the client. If soap and water are not available, use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol; use the hand sanitizer frequently.

