

Recommendations for Mitigations and Managing COVID-19 Exposures and Illness in Shared and Congregate Housing

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This guide provides prevention and mitigation recommendations for DOI bureaus and office building managers who are responsible for housing employees and volunteers in shared or “congregate” housing to prevent the spread of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). These recommendations are applicable to shared housing facilities owned and managed by the Department, which may include housing such as bunk houses, student housing, national and state park staff housing, hotels, and fire camp housing. This document draws on information provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) COVID-19 [Guidance for Shared or Congregate Housing](#).

Below is a summary of pertinent points from the CDC guidance referenced above, which managers are encouraged to refer to for more detailed information.

Shared housing situations may present challenges for implementing standard COVID-19 mitigation measures, such as [social distancing](#), and may not be practical or even feasible when using shared spaces (e.g. recreational, dining, cooking, and laundry facilities). Additionally, sleeping quarters that house multiple people in a single room can create challenges when self-quarantine or self-isolation is necessary.

Building managers are encouraged to develop and implement a plan to regularly assess, prevent, and respond to COVID-19 in their shared living facilities. As the Department’s ability to prevent exposure and respond to and mitigate the transmission of COVID-19 in shared housing varies, a one-size fits all approach will not be effective in all shared housing situations. As such, building managers are encouraged to consult with public health, health and safety personnel, and leadership to assess and develop the specifics of their plan. Additionally, building managers should refer to CDC guidance for specific COVID-19 directives within their jurisdiction to best prevent and limit the spread of COVID-19 in their shared housing facilities.

When developing this plan, building managers are encouraged to utilize platforms such as email, websites, hotlines, automated text messaging, newsletters, [signs](#) or flyers to help communicate information to employees and to encourage residents to follow guidance and directives from [DOI](#) and the [CDC](#).

Managers are encouraged to consider including the following as part of their plans:

- Information about onboarding guidance, such as how a resident should assess his/her symptoms for COVID-19 prior to entering into shared housing.
- Information about how residents who are high risk for severe illness may self-identify with their supervisor. Individuals who have [an increased risk of severe illness from COVID-19](#) should consider the risks of shared housing and are encouraged to raise any

issues with their supervisor.

- Reminders to follow DOI's symptom monitoring procedures as outlined in DOI's "[Pandemic Social Distancing and Daily Health Monitoring Implementation Guidelines for Department of the Interior \(DOI\) and Work Locations](#)" and DOI's Workplace Safety Plan.
- A process to rearrange facilities to ensure that residents can [social distance](#) while inside of the shared housing facility, staying at least 6 feet apart from others when possible. Additional detail about these recommendations can be found in DOI's "[Pandemic Social Distancing and Daily Health Monitoring Implementation Guidelines for Department of the Interior \(DOI\) and Work Locations.](#)"
- Reminders to wear masks, in accordance with [DOI](#) policies and as outlined in DOI's Workplace Safety Plan.
- A strategy for minimizing risk. For example, when possible, building managers may assign individuals separate living quarters. In situations where this is not possible, building managers can assess risk and take precautions to limit exposures and comingling among residents in common areas (e.g. assign common living quarters or specific shared areas, like bathrooms, to residents who work in the same area or unit). Building managers can also encourage residents to limit intermingling in private living quarters and prohibit non-residents from entering the shared living facility unless absolutely necessary.
- A process for ensuring COVID-19 prevention supplies such as soap, alcohol-based hand sanitizers that contain at least 60% alcohol, tissues, trash baskets, personal protective equipment (e.g. gloves), and disinfectants from [EPA's List N: Disinfectants for Coronavirus](#) are readily available to residents and cleaning staff in common areas. Residents and cleaning staff should follow the Pandemic [Social Distancing and Daily Health Monitoring Implementation Guidelines for Department of the Interior \(DOI\) and Work Locations Guidance](#) when using these supplies.
- Reminders to limit sharing of common items among residents. For example, residents should use and store their own supplies (e.g. dishes, drinking glasses, cups, laundry detergent, shampoos, or eating utensils) and personal items (e.g. toothbrushes) should be kept in personal containers/totes and never placed directly on shared surfaces.
- Reminders about hand hygiene, including [hand washing](#), the use of alcohol-based hand sanitizers, or the use of disposable gloves after handling shared items, after handling and disposing of trash, and when cleaning up shared areas.
- Recommendations to residents to stagger meals, breaks, and food preparation times, rather than preparing food and dining at socially conventional times. This may also include recommendations to residents to use 'grab and go' options, dine outdoors, or dine inside their living quarters.
- A process for assessing, and if necessary, improving ventilation in the shared facility that is consistent with CDC and OSHA guidance and DOI's COVID-19 Workplace Safety

Plan.

- Reminders to limit or consider refraining from activities and sports in common areas where residents may come into [close contact](#) during non-work hours.

Signage

Managers should also consider placing signs detailing their plan at building entrances and in communal areas. If signage is placed at building entrances and in communal areas it may include information about occupancy recommendations, potential restrictions of the number of people allowed in communal areas, reminders to clean and disinfect high-touch surfaces (e.g. light switches, knobs, and handles of laundry machines, refrigerators, coffee makers), reminders about mask requirements, and reminders about visitor policies. Examples of possible signs are provided on the DOI [COVID-19 Signage Page](#).

Confirmed or Suspected COVID-19 Cases or Exposures in a Shared Housing Facility

Building managers are also encouraged to develop a site-specific plan to address a situation in which a resident has COVID-19 (suspected or confirmed) or is exposed to someone with COVID-19. Building managers are encouraged to address self-quarantine and self-isolation in their plans. Building managers are also encouraged to address how to protect the privacy of residents with suspected or confirmed COVID-19, and how to further limit and prevent exposures and illness among other residents. This could include establishing separate and safe onsite or offsite living quarters to self-isolate or self-quarantine, as indicated in CDC guidance.

Building managers are further encouraged to develop a communication plan, based on and consistent with DOI's guidance and CDC guidance, to protect employee privacy during COVID-19. For example, only those individuals with a bona fide need to know (e.g., building manager, Human Resources, safety officials) have the authority to make disclosures about sick residents or shared housing exposures as authorized and necessary to provide for the public health and safety of Federal employees and contractors. Per the CDC [guidance](#) and [GSA Cleaning and Disinfection Procedures](#), any area occupied by a person diagnosed with COVID-19 will be closed for at least 24 hours before being sanitized. If more than seven days have passed since the person who is sick visited or used the residence, additional cleaning and disinfection is not necessary.

Building managers are encouraged to prepare for situation involving self-quarantine, self-isolation, and the need to transport persons with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 for testing or medical care using CDC [guidance](#). After transporting an individual, it is recommended the building managers follow CDC [guidelines](#) for cleaning and disinfecting any transport vehicles.