

March 25, 2020

During this COVID-19 pandemic and North Dakota State of Emergency The North Dakota Department of Human Services would like to thank you for providing essential behavioral health services to individuals in need of Substance Use Disorder care. While continuing to provide these medically necessary services to vulnerable individuals ND-DHS would like to provide you with the following guidance and resources.

### **Guidance for Licensed Substance Use Disorder Treatment Programs**

**Coordinate with local health officials.** This should be a first step in making decisions about responses to the presence of COVID-19 in the community. Health officials can help determine which set of strategies might be most appropriate for the organization's situation.

**Minimize exposure.** Attempt to minimize the number of staff members who have face-to-face interactions with clients with respiratory symptoms. Use physical barriers to protect staff who will have interactions with clients with unknown infection status (e.g. check-in staff). For example, install a sneeze guard at the check-in desk or place an additional table between staff and clients to increase the distance between them.

North Dakota Department of Human Services encourages providers to utilize telebehavioral health services, where appropriate, to continue care while facilitating social distancing. Substance abuse treatment program licensing does not restrict the use of telebehavioral health services. Ensure that the platform used is Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) and 42 CFR Part 2 compliant. Also, ensure any guidance or requirements from individual licensing boards are followed.

Service documentation should be completed in the client record in the same way as required in North Dakota Administrative Code.

**Screening patients.** Screen patients and visitors for symptoms of acute respiratory illness (e.g., fever, cough, difficulty breathing) before entering your healthcare facility. Provide anyone with respiratory symptoms (cough, fever) with a mask. Keep up to date on the recommendations for preventing spread of COVID-19 on [CDC's website](#).

**Identify clients who could be at [high risk](#) for complications** from COVID-19 (those who are older or have underlying health conditions) to ensure their needs are taken into consideration.

**Include contingency plans** for increased absenteeism caused by employee illness or by illness in employees' family members that requires employees to stay home. These plans might include extending hours, cross-training current employees, hiring temporary employees, or contracting with other providers utilizing telebehavioral health.

**Promote the practice of everyday preventive actions.** Use health messages and materials developed by credible public health sources, such as your local and state public health departments or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Read more about [everyday preventive actions](#). Ensure patients and team members are oriented and trained in preventative actions and any emergency protocols and procedures.

**Provide COVID-19 prevention supplies at your organization.** Have supplies on hand for staff, volunteers, and those you serve, such as soap, alcohol-based hand sanitizers that contain at least 60% alcohol, tissues, trash baskets, and disposable [facemaskpdf icon](#). Plan to have extra supplies on hand during a COVID-19 outbreak.

If you need Personal Protective Equipment [Order supplies here](#) from the North Dakota Department of Health Emergency Preparedness Program

If your licensed program will be closing either temporarily or permanently please notify The Behavioral Health Division at (701) 328-8920 or [SUDtxteam@nd.gov](mailto:SUDtxteam@nd.gov) to report this closure.

**Emergency Contacts.** Ensure emergency contacts are up to date for all patients, team members, volunteers, and board members.

### **Residential Programming Guidance**

**Implement multiple social distancing strategies.** Select strategies based on feasibility given the unique space and needs of the organization. Not all strategies will be appropriate or feasible for all organizations. Administrators and leaders are encouraged to think creatively about all opportunities to increase the physical space between individuals and limit interactions in large group settings. Consider ways to accommodate the needs of individuals at [higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19](#) in all strategies.

**If staff are handling client belongings, they should use disposable gloves.** Make sure to train any staff using gloves to [ensure proper use](#).

**Limit access to the facility by non-essential visitors.** Limit the presence of non-essential volunteers and other visitors, when possible.

**Plan for staff and volunteer absences.** Develop flexible attendance and sick-leave policies. Staff (and volunteers) may need to stay home when they are sick, caring for a sick household member, or caring for their children in the event of school dismissals. Identify critical job functions and positions, and plan for alternative coverage by cross-training staff members.

*Note: Use a process similar to the one you use when you cover for staff workers during the holidays.*

**Communicate with your local health department** if you are concerned that clients in your facility might have COVID-19. [Learn more about COVID-19 symptoms](#).

**Download [COVID-19 posters and CDC Fact Sheets](#) and keep your clients and guests informed about public health recommendations.** Messaging may include:

- Posting signs at entrances and in strategic places providing instruction on hand hygiene, respiratory hygiene, and cough etiquette.
- Encouraging ill staff and volunteers to stay home (or be sent home if they develop symptoms while at the facility), to prevent transmitting the infection to others.

**Provide access to fluids, tissues, plastic bags** for the proper disposal of used tissues.

**Ensure bathrooms and other sinks are consistently stocked with soap and drying materials for handwashing.** Provide alcohol-based hand sanitizers that contain at least 60% alcohol (if that is an option at your shelter) at key points within the facility, including registration desks, entrances/exits, and eating areas.

**Ensure that all common areas within the facility follow good practices for environmental cleaning.** Cleaning should be conducted in accordance with CDC [recommendations](#).

**Confine clients with mild respiratory [symptoms](#) consistent with COVID-19 infection to individual rooms, if possible, and have them avoid common areas.**

- Follow CDC [recommendations](#) for how to prevent further spread in your facility.
- If individual rooms for sick clients are not available, consider using a large, well-ventilated room.
- If possible, designate a separate bathroom for sick clients with COVID-19 symptoms.

- Consider reducing cleaning frequency in bedrooms and bathrooms dedicated to ill persons to **as-needed** cleaning (e.g., of soiled items and surfaces) to avoid unnecessary contact with the ill persons.

**If you identify any client with severe symptoms, notify your public health department and arrange for the client to receive immediate medical care.** If this is a client with suspected COVID-19, notify the transfer team and medical facility before transfer.

Please continue to check the [North Dakota Department of Human Services Webpage](#) for continual updates and resources related to COVID-19. If you have any questions regarding this information, please feel free to call 701-328-8920 or e-mail [dhsbhd@nd.gov](mailto:dhsbhd@nd.gov).