

March 30, 2020

AR 169674

Re: Exemptions and Clarifications for Operators of Shelters and Temporary or Transitional Housing Facilities, related to Chief Medical Officer of Health Orders

On March 16, 2020, in my capacity as Chief Medical Officer of Health (CMOH), I declared a state of public health emergency in Alberta, due to the presence of COVID-19 in the province. The Government of Alberta recognizes that the operators of shelters and temporary or transitional housing facilities provide an essential service in Alberta, particularly during this time of emergency. This includes the operators of any site for Albertans facing homelessness or family violence. I am pleased to provide the following exemptions and clarifications related to my recent Orders.

CMOH Order 07-2020, Clauses 1-5

On March 27, 2020, under CMOH Order 07-2020 Clause 3, I announced that indoor gatherings in excess of 15 people in a group are prohibited and that any people gathering in an indoor location must maintain a minimum of 2 metres distance from one another. Clause 5 confirms that these gatherings applies to any type of public or private gathering, including but not limited to, weddings, funerals, religious services, informal events etc.

- The clause 3 prohibition does not apply to the the normal operations of shelters and temporary or transitional housing settings. Normal operations of essential services that include more than 15 people may proceed, but risk mitigation strategies such as physical distancing must be in place.
- Non-essential indoor and outdoor gatherings that include more than 15 people, such as informal social gatherings, are subject to CMOH 07-2020 and must not proceed.
- CMOH Order 07-2020 is available at <https://open.alberta.ca/publications/cmoh-order-07-2020-2020-covid-19-response>.

Physical distancing in shelter settings

I am providing the following exemption and clarification for residents of shelters and transitional or temporary housing facilities who do not have COVID-19 symptoms:

- Under ideal circumstances, the 2 metre distance applies to the head to toe placement of mats, cots and beds; however, recognizing the current space limitations in many shelters and the necessity of providing adequate beds to vulnerable Albertans, the minimum requirement for head to toe placement of mats, cots and beds is 1 metre.
- For shelters that operate on a 24 hour basis, shelter operators must facilitate 2 metres of physical distance between clients during normal daytime operations.

Clients who require isolation due to suspected or confirmed cases of COVID-19

Operators are encouraged to prioritize moving clients who have a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 to an external, assisted isolation space. For shelters providing services for clients who are homeless, this may mean moving the client to an isolation space or facility that has been identified by shelter networks in various cities and locations around the province. For clients who are facing family violence, this may mean securing a hotel room for the client.

- In the event that an operator of a shelter or temporary or transitional housing facility determines they have adequate space to set up a separate room or section specifically for client isolation or if a group of operators determined to designate one of their facilities as an isolation-only shelter; the operator(s) must follow the requirement, under CMOH 07-2020, to ensure 2 meters of distance between people, including within sleeping arrangements. Alberta Health Services public health in each Zone should be consulted to ensure these spaces can meet environmental health and infection, prevention and control standards.

Symptomatic staff and volunteers

On March 25, 2020, under CMOH Order 05-2020, I required that any person who is exhibiting any of the following symptoms: cough, fever, shortness of breath, runny nose or sore throat, which are not related to a pre-existing illness or health condition, must be in isolation for an minimum of 10 days from the start of their symptoms, or until the symptoms resolve, whichever is longer.

- Staff and volunteers at shelters and transitional or temporary housing facilities must follow this requirement and must stay home if exhibiting any of the above-listed symptoms.
- CMOH Order 05-2020 can be found at <https://open.alberta.ca/publications/cmoh-order-05-2020-2020-covid-19-response>.

Finally, please be advised that Alberta Health and Alberta Health Services are currently preparing a resource for shelters that amalgamates COVID-19 prevention and outbreak management information. Once this is available, it will replace the *Guidance for Providers of Services to Albertans Experiencing (or at-risk of) Homelessness: 2019*

Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) Prevention and Preparation document that was released on March 16. We anticipate this document will also meet the information needs of the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters as well as other shelter-related needs identified by CSS (e.g., a clear process for requesting PPE and a consistent screening protocol).

This is the best guidance that can be offered at this time and we will continue to work with CSS to assess the situation going forward.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Deena', with a large, stylized flourish extending to the left.

Deena Hinshaw, BSc, MD, MPH, CCFP, FRCP
Chief Medical Officer of Health

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