



March 19, 2020

## Interim Guidance for Community Habilitation Services Regarding COVID-19

*This document provides agencies and organizations with information about home and community-based services as it relates to the 2019 novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19).*

### **Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV2)**

Health officials are still learning how a newly discovered respiratory virus, severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV2), spreads and how severe the infection can be. SARS-CoV2 is the virus that causes COVID-19 illness. As surveillance activities continue and additional cases are detected, we will update information about the community spread of COVID-19.

### **Important Information About How COVID-19 Spreads**

- The virus is thought to spread mainly from person to person.
  - Between people who are in close contact with one another (within 6 feet).
  - Through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes.
  - These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs.
- It may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes.
- People are thought to be most contagious when they are most symptomatic (the sickest).
- Spread before people show symptoms may be possible.

### **Considerations About Your Agency's Services**

- Treatment teams should assess the needs of each individual and consider how the needs of the individual can be met while maintaining safe social distancing;
- Planning for temporary modifications to service plans, in response to COVID-19 precautions, may include the need to consider alternative services and/or alternative service settings; and
- Consideration should be given to whether delivery of community habilitation services remotely by other mechanisms (e.g., phone call, video conference), may be appropriate for the individual. This must be implemented in accordance with *the Revised Interim Guidance Regarding the Delivery of Services Through the Use of Telehealth Modalities in Facilities and Programs Certified or Operated by OPWDD*, dated March 17, 2020. (available at:



<https://opwdd.ny.gov/sites/default/files/documents/3.17.2020%20REVISED%20telehealth%20guidance%20%283%29.pdf>

- If the treatment team determines that the community habilitation services are essential and do not need to be restricted, extended, or modified, then staff should call ahead and ask the clients or family members, if applicable, the questions in the algorithm in **Appendix A**.

### **General Infection Prevention Strategies**

Organizations should encourage staff to routinely employ infection prevention strategies to reduce transmission of common respiratory viruses (e.g., influenza or “flu” or “the common cold”).

- Stay home if you are sick.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing (in the absence of a tissue, cough or sneeze into your shirt sleeve or bent arm).
- Keep your hands clean (wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds). Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, if soap and water are not available.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Get the flu shot (at this time, there is no current vaccination for coronaviruses).

The routine use of these infection prevention strategies cannot be overemphasized, especially washing your hands often with soap and water. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers are also effective.

#### About Facemasks:

In line with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the NYS Health Department does not recommend the routine use of masks if you are healthy.

Facemasks are not warranted for general/routine tasks by staff – even those who have frequent interaction with the general public.

### **Guard Against Stigma**

Organizations should work to prevent actions that could perpetuate stigma attached to COVID-19 or appear to be targeted at one group of people. There is absolutely no excuse for using the outbreak as a way to spread racism and discrimination. Organizations should encourage that staff stay informed, remain vigilant and take care of each other.

### **More information:**



NYS Department of Health Novel Coronavirus hotline: **1-888-364-3065.**

New York State Department of Health's COVID-19 Webpage:  
<https://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/coronavirus/>

Local Health Department Contact Information:  
[https://www.health.ny.gov/contact/contact\\_information/index.htm](https://www.health.ny.gov/contact/contact_information/index.htm)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Webpage:  
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/>

[OPWDD COVID-19 Webpage](#)

[https://opwdd.ny.gov/news\\_and\\_publications/coronavirus-guidance-opwdd-service-providers](https://opwdd.ny.gov/news_and_publications/coronavirus-guidance-opwdd-service-providers)

# COVID-19 Interim Guidance for Community Habilitation Services

## Appendix A. Recommended Questions and Guidance for Community Habilitation Regarding COVID-19

