



IN THE KNOW COVID-19

From seasonal flu outbreaks to the novel coronavirus, it may seem like germs are out to get us. By making a solid plan and using that plan in case of illness, you'll be one step ahead. Let's get you in the know for addressing illnesses such as COVID-19.

Because knowledge of the virus continues to evolve, you'll want to check in regularly with the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and other resources listed here, as well as your state and local agencies for updates.

Overview of COVID-19

Part of the concern and fear created by a public health outbreak happens as a result of mystery, so a little bit of knowledge about how the disease spreads is helpful.

When a sick person talks, coughs or sneezes, they spread droplets containing the virus. Those droplets land on people and objects. If we touch one of those infected surfaces, then touch our nose, mouth or eyes, we may get the virus. COVID-19 has a two- to 14-day incubation period. That means people could be carrying it and sharing it for quite a while before symptoms like fever, cough or shortness of breath emerge. Some people who get infected may never show symptoms.

Make a Plan Now

Coordinate with your community owner or other management team members to create your community's emergency action plan for infectious disease preparation and response. Already have a plan? Great! Pull it out and make sure you're covered for new diseases like COVID-19. Your plan will likely cover these general areas:

- **Where People Hang Out**
- **Team TLC**
- **Don't Forget Your Residents**
- **Outside Your Community**

Find a balance between responding too lightly, as if this were a minor concern, and pushing panic buttons. There are plenty of precautions to take that will decrease the likelihood of illness.

The following points are not supposed to be a comprehensive list or legal advice, but rather some considerations to start your planning. Keep in mind that liability issues ranging from sick residents to employee exposure may creep up. It's smart to connect with legal counsel in advance to reduce your risk wherever possible.

LEARN MORE :: CDC PREVENTION PROTOCOLS

- Wash hands often with soap and water for a minimum of 20 seconds. If soap and water are unavailable, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact (less than 6 feet) with people who are sick.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue away.
- Frequently clean and disinfect touched objects and surfaces.





Where People Hang Out



- Wipe out those germs by increasing the frequency of scheduled cleaning for common areas in the community, including the office.
- Between scheduled cleanings, frequently wipe down community common area surfaces such as elevator buttons, intercom panels, business center computers, fitness equipment, laundry machines and doorknobs.
- Provide disinfectant wipes and encourage team members to wipe down all the high-touch items such as desks, door or cabinet knobs, light switches, keyboard/mouse, phones, shared pens, etc.
- Speaking of disinfectants, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has a list of products that are approved against the novel coronavirus that causes COVID-19 (see resource section).
- Stock hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol on every desk, in common areas and even in models or show apartments.
- What's better than hand sanitizer? Plain old hand washing. Keep bathrooms stocked with plenty of soap and paper towels
- When you greet guests, will you use a hand shake? Wave? Elbow bump? Talk it out with the team and agree on a strategy.
- Add disinfecting wipes to spiff buckets so you can wipe the doorknobs in apartments that are being shown.
- Buy extra supplies, if possible, in case of shortages or supply chain disruptions.



Team TLC



- Well informed is well armed. The CDC has downloadable materials in English and Spanish to share with your team (see resources).
- If team members are sick, the best place for them is at home. This may mean adjusting your leave policy in case of long absences.
- Remind the team to let you know immediately if they or family members have been exposed to the virus or have symptoms.
- Team members should also let you know if a household member is more vulnerable to the virus, which might impact how much exposure that team member should avoid.
- Think about decreasing in-office staff to help reduce exposure, and let employees do whatever work they can do from home. Test telecommuting technology before you need it.
- Cross-train team members, and plan for temporary staffing needs if team members become ill or are quarantined.
- In case key staff or contractors are not available, make sure that manuals and operating instructions for equipment and systems are easy to find.
- Postpone non-urgent maintenance tasks that involve close contact with others so maintenance technicians are not over-exposed.
- Team members should use consistent practices to protect themselves from infectious diseases in a resident's apartment, not just if they suspect the resident may be sick.
- Make sure emergency contact lists are updated for employees and that everyone knows how to stay in touch with supervisors.
- Postpone or cancel employee meetings that involve travel or large groups of people where germs are running wild. Try to do more of these via teleconference and monitor CDC's travel restrictions and guidance.
- OSHA says that employees may decline to do work if they feel they are in "imminent danger." That includes the danger of infection. Get up-to-date on CDC and OSHA protocols for personal protective equipment and cleaning chemicals brought onsite (see resources).



Don't Forget Your Residents



- Don't leave them guessing. Post links to reliable information about COVID-19, plus updates to physical bulletin boards and to your community webpages, especially about changes to staffing, services, event schedules, etc.
- Develop alternate ways to get the word out if needed (app-based notifications, text messages, social media, etc.) and keep contact info up to date.
- Post signs in amenity areas such as a fitness center about CDC recommendations for basic hygiene, and reminding residents to wipe down equipment before and after using it. Even better, ask residents to forgo using these amenities if they are sick.
- Reassure prospective residents that you are happy to reschedule a tour if they are under the weather. Better yet, work with them over the phone to guide them through viewing apartments via your website.
- Residents may assume the worst if team members are ill, so encourage team members to obtain a seasonal flu vaccine, and stay home if they are sick.
- Urge residents to use the portal or other options to pay online or place service requests via an online portal or by phone, to cut down on traffic in the office.
- Consider a temporary hold on community events that would bring groups of residents together.
- Plan how to handle both emergency and non-emergency service requests for residents who may be quarantined at home.
- Some policies might need to be changed temporarily, or services cut back, such as closing a fitness room or limiting maintenance to emergencies only. Keep residents up to date on these changes.
- In case of a widespread COVID-19 outbreak, some residents may lose income or access to financial accounts. Show understanding and work with them on lease payments.



Outside Your Community



- Get in touch with your local and state health departments and learn how best to get updates on local outbreaks, recommendations and mandatory procedures if needed.
- Collect primary and alternate contact info for vendors and suppliers.
- Services from vendors and suppliers may slow due to their own staffing issues. Plan for backups for trash removal and other vital services.
- Have and review media communications protocols for your community:
 - Who should be the one to talk with the media?
 - Remember the importance of confidentiality in speaking about a resident's or team member's health and get legal advice if you're not sure what you can say.
 - Outline in advance the key points to address with the media regarding precautions and procedures your community is following.
 - Ensure a positive, community-focused mindset. Provide information to reduce wild speculation, but don't overdo it and cause a panic.

LEARN MORE :: RESOURCES AND LINKS

Please visit the CDC website regularly for updates on status and best practices: <https://www.cdc.gov/>

You can also sign up for email updates from the CDC: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/whats-new-all.html>

The CDC has handouts in English and Spanish to share with staff and/or residents: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/communication/index.html>

If you would like additional suggestions or guidance on best response procedures for businesses, the CDC has prepared guidelines here: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/guidance-business-response.html>

For information on COVID-19 and OSHA regulations: <https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/covid-19/standards.html>

EPA guidelines on recommended disinfectants: <https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2>