

February 14, 2020

2019 Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV) Home Visit Considerations for City Agencies that Have Staff who Provide Counseling or Other Services that Necessitate Prolonged, Close Contact

This report is provided "as is" for informational purposes only. The NYC Health Department does not provide any warranties of any kind regarding any information contained within. This document is distributed as TLP: AMBER: The information in this product is only for members of their own organizations and those with DIRECT NEED TO KNOW. This information is NOT to be forwarded on beyond NEED TO KNOW recipients. For more information on the Traffic Light Protocol, see <https://www.us-cert.gov/tlp>

Note: This document is intended to provide city agencies with information and considerations for staff members that provide counseling or other services that necessitate close contact (i.e., within 6 feet for a prolonged period of time) with individuals in home settings as it relates to the 2019 novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV). Examples of prolonged, close contact include sitting face-to-face with a client to discuss/assess needs or perform case investigations. This guidance is not intended for staff who perform inspections in households that do not necessitate close contact (e.g., equipment inspections).

2019 Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV)

Health officials are still learning about how a newly discovered respiratory virus, 2019-nCoV, spreads and how severe the infection can be. Based on current information, the health risk to non-healthcare workers is considered low because there is no evidence that person-to-person transmission is occurring in New York City. That assessment may change in the weeks to months ahead.

Guard Against Stigma

All city agencies should work to prevent actions that could perpetuate stigma attached to 2019-nCoV 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. As city agencies, we should encourage that staff stay informed, remain vigilant and take care of each other.

Safety & Health Considerations for City Agencies with Staff that Perform Home Visits

Based on the current 2019-nCoV scenario, city agencies that have staff that provide in-person counseling or other services that necessitate close contact with clients may want to consider the steps outlined below. This should be followed for ALL home visits.

> *If staff normally call ahead to confirm or schedule a home visit:*

- Staff can ask the client if anyone in the household has:
 - (a) Fever, cough or shortness of breath?
 - (b) In the 14 days prior to home visit, has anyone in the household been to China – or has recently had contact with a person who is suspected or confirmed to have infection with the 2019 novel coronavirus?
- If the client says yes to (a) and (b), staff can politely ask them for their availability to re-schedule when they or the family member are feeling better. If agency policy allows, a phone meeting may be appropriate. The client should also be advised to see their medical provider – but to call ahead and let their medical provider know of symptoms, and recent travel from China (or having contact with a person who is suspected or confirmed to have infection with the 2019 novel coronavirus)



February 14, 2020

> *On the day of the visit (whether staff has asked the questions above or not) OR If staff normally do not call ahead to confirm or schedule visit or the visit is regular/periodic/pre-determined or an unscheduled visit:*

- Before staff enter the premises, they can inquire as to the above.
- If the client says yes to (a) and (b), staff can politely ask to re-schedule when they or the family member are feeling better - or arrange for a phone consult/meeting (if appropriate and your agency policies allow). The client should also be advised to see their medical provider – but to call ahead and let their medical provider know of symptoms, and recent travel from China (or having contact with a person who is suspected or confirmed to have infection with the 2019 novel coronavirus).

General Infection Prevention Strategies

City agencies should encourage staff to routinely employ infection prevention strategies to reduce transmission of common respiratory viruses (e.g., influenza or “flu,” “common cold viruses”). These include:

- 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 Face Masks

Facemasks are not warranted for general/routine tasks by city agency staff – even those that require frequent interaction with the general public. (Note: Some city agency staff may be required to use either facemasks or N95 respirators depending on the type of visit or per their agency protocol for reasons unrelated to the current 2019-nCoV outbreak. If so, such staff should proceed to use facemasks or N95 respirators).

While not at work (e.g. personal time), use of face masks would be a personal choice, though it also is not recommended by DOHMH for healthy people. No coronavirus-specific precautions are recommended for interactions with the general public, including persons showing no symptoms who have visited affected parts of the world.