

Non-Agency Based In-Home Caregivers (e.g. PCAs, Independent Nurses, etc.) 2019 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) Guidance

March 12, 2020

Intended Audience: In-home caregivers who **do not** work for an agency.

Special Note: The term “client” is used throughout this document to refer to individuals receiving services, with the acknowledgement that different programs use different terms. For example, the MassHealth PCA Program uses the term “consumer” instead of “client”. This was done to provide broader applicability and standardization.

This guidance is based on what is currently known about the transmission and severity of 2019 novel Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19). The Massachusetts Department of Public Health is working closely with the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to provide updated information about the COVID-19 outbreak.

This guidance will be updated as needed and as additional information is available. Please regularly check [mass.gov/2019coronavirus](https://www.mass.gov/2019coronavirus) for updated interim guidance.

Unless you have recently traveled to a [COVID-19-affected geographic area](#) outside of the U.S. in the past 14 days, have a fever or new respiratory symptoms such as cough, shortness of breath, or sore throat, have been in close contact with someone diagnosed with COVID-19 in the past 14 days, or have been told by a health care provider that you may have COVID-19 you should:

Continue working and providing services to individuals who need support with their activities of daily living;

Ask the self-check and client-check screening questions before every visit (or daily, if you are a live-in caregiver); and

Follow the precautionary steps outlined below.

Background

What is Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) and how does it spread?

COVID-19 is a respiratory virus. Current symptoms have included mild to severe respiratory illness with fever, cough, and difficulty breathing.

According to CDC, the virus is spread mainly from person-to-person, between people who are in close contact with each other (within about 6 feet).

Spread is from respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes.

Who should be most cautious?

Those considered “high risk” include people over the age of 60, anyone with underlying health conditions or a weakened immune system, and pregnant women.

What should you be doing to mitigate the risk of spreading COVID-19?

Screen yourself and clients for any of the conditions below:

- Sick with fever (Higher than 100.3 °F) or newly developed respiratory illness such as cough, shortness of breath, or sore throat
- Recent international travel (i.e., within the past 14 days) from [COVID-19-affected geographic areas](#)
- Close contact with a person diagnosed with COVID-19 in the past 14 days
- Live-in caregivers should be screening themselves and their clients daily

Avoid unnecessary out of state or international travel and avoid large gatherings or crowds.

- As a caregiver, you provide essential services that help others to function throughout their daily lives. Your health and the health of those you serve is of utmost importance. You should try to limit travel as much as possible to limit possible contact with the virus.
- Cancel large and do not attend large gatherings (greater than 250 people).

Practice good hygiene daily.

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially:
 - After going to the bathroom;
 - Before eating;
 - After blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing; and
 - Upon entering and exiting the client’s home.
- If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.
- Cover a cough or sneeze with a tissue and dispose of tissue.
- Don’t touch your eyes, nose or mouth without first carefully washing your hands.
- Properly clean all frequently touched surfaces on a regular basis using everyday [cleaning products](#).
- Avoid sharing dishes, drinking glasses, eating utensils, or towels.
- Wash dirty dishes in a dishwasher or, if by hand, with warm water and soap.
- Laundry can be washed in a standard washing machine with warm water. It is not necessary to separate laundry used by a client from other household laundry.
- In order to avoid germs, do not shake dirty laundry or “hug” dirty laundry to your chest to carry it.

Monitor your own emotional health.

- Emotional reactions to stressful situations such as new viruses are expected. Remind yourself that feeling sad, anxious, overwhelmed, or having trouble sleeping or other symptoms of distress is normal.
- If symptoms become worse, last longer than a month, or you struggle to participate in your usual daily activities, reach out for support and help.
- The national Disaster Distress Helpline is available with 24/7 emotional support and crisis counseling for anyone experiencing distress or other mental health concerns. Calls (1-800-985-5990) and texts (text TalkWithUs to 66746) are answered by trained counselors who will listen to your concerns, explore coping and other available supports, and offer referrals to community resources for follow-up care and support.

Steps to follow if you, or someone you know or care for is sick

If you are sick:

- Do not go in to work. Call your health care provider for further guidance.
- Follow the steps outlined on page 3.

Follow the flow chart on page 3 to determine the best care path for an individual for whom you provide care and who is diagnosed with COVID-19 or is experiencing symptoms.

If you live with a sick individual some general guidance includes:

- Keeping the sick person in a separate, well-ventilated room and apart from other people and pets as much as possible.
- If a separate space is not available, keeping a distance of at least six feet from people who are well.
- A sick person who is coughing or sneezing should wear a mask when around other people. If the sick person cannot wear a mask, the caregiver should wear a mask.
- Providing the sick person with a separate bathroom if available and a trash bag within reach. The bathroom should be cleaned every day using a household disinfectant according to the directions on the label. Wear gloves while cleaning.
- Limiting activities outside the home until the sick person is feeling well for at least one day.
- Limiting outside visitors.

