



Health and  
Wellness

# Prince Edward Island Guidelines for Respiratory and Gastrointestinal Illness in Shelters

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Department of Health and Wellness  
Chief Public Health Office

## Guidance for Respiratory and Gastrointestinal Illness in Shelters

This guidance document is intended to assist in minimizing the transmission of Respiratory and Gastrointestinal (GI) illness among Islanders who are unhoused (homelessness) or precariously housed, and to prevent and manage individual cases in shelters and facilities that serve people who are unhoused or precariously housed.

These facilities, by nature of being shared living spaces, are at higher risk for transmission of infectious illness, and some populations who live in these settings may also be at higher risk of severe outcomes from certain illnesses. On a routine basis, everyday practices should be in place to reduce the risk of introducing and spreading of infectious illness. Facilities should be following these recommendations regardless of whether there are any staff or residents with symptoms or confirmed cases of illness.

<b>Routine Public Health Recommendations</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Hand Hygiene</b>	<p>Hand hygiene is everyone’s responsibility; including staff, residents, and visitors, and is the most effective way to prevent the spread of germs.</p> <p>Wash hands with soap and water often. When soap and water are not available, and hands are not visibly dirty, an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol can be used. (See Appendix A)</p>
<b>Respiratory Etiquette</b>	<p>Respiratory etiquette helps to prevent the spread of germs to others. Cover coughs and sneezes using a tissue or elbow rather than hands.</p>
<b>Environmental Cleaning and Disinfection</b>	<p>Environmental cleaning and disinfection are two different, but equally important steps to help reduce the transmission of viruses and other germs.</p> <p>Regular cleaning and disinfection should also include frequently touched surfaces like handrails, doorknobs, light switches, toilets, and tabletops. (See section on cleaning and disinfection)</p>
<b>Get Immunized</b>	<p>Stay up to date on recommended routine and seasonal immunizations to protect yourself and others around you.</p>

## Respiratory Illness

Respiratory illnesses are often spread when infected people cough, or sneeze, and the droplets come into contact with the mucous membranes of the eyes, mouth, nose, or airway of another person. Infections can also be spread indirectly when people touch contaminated surfaces, objects or another person's contaminated hands and then infect themselves by touching their eyes, mouth, or nose.

### **Symptoms of respiratory illness include:**

- new or worsening cough
- fever or chills
- difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- sore throat
- congestion, runny nose and/or sneezing
- headache
- new loss of sense of smell or taste
- muscle or body aches
- fatigue or weakness

## Gastrointestinal Illness

Gastrointestinal illness is caused by a variety of pathogens that affect the gastrointestinal tract and is typically acquired through consuming contaminated food or water, or contact with infected animals, environments, or people.

### **Symptoms of gastrointestinal illness include:**

- fever
- weakness
- abdominal pain
- vomiting
- diarrhea

### **Gastrointestinal illness is defined as:**

- Two or more episodes of diarrhea in a 24-hour period – above what is considered normal for that individual

**OR**

- Two or more episodes of vomiting in a 24-hour period

**OR**

- One episode each of vomiting and diarrhea in a 24-hour period

## Preventing Transmission of Illness:

- Proper hand hygiene (Appendix A): Wash hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use an alcohol-based hand rub (ABHR) with at least 60% alcohol rubbing hands until dry (20-30 seconds)
- Respiratory etiquette: Cover coughs and sneezes; coughing into your sleeve or a tissue followed by hand hygiene
- Wearing a mask when in communal settings if feeling unwell
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands
- Increased access to hand hygiene and cough etiquette supplies (tissues, ABHR)
- Avoid sharing personal items that cannot be cleaned between use
- Avoid overcrowding (e.g., where possible promote a minimum of 6 ft between individuals)
- Post signage throughout the facility reminding staff and clients about signs and symptoms of illness, respiratory etiquette, and hand hygiene.

## Cleaning and Disinfection

- In addition to routine cleaning, surfaces that are frequently touched should be cleaned **and** disinfected twice per day and when visibly dirty (doorknobs, light switches, toilet handles, handrails, etc.).
- Environmental disinfectants that are a hospital grade, registered in Canada with a Drug Identification Number (DIN), are sufficient for environmental cleaning.
- If commercially prepared hospital disinfectants are not available, the facility may use a diluted bleach solution to disinfect the environment.
  - Household bleach (5-6%) mixed at a ratio of 1 part bleach to 10 parts water - 1:10 (giving approximately 5000 parts per million (ppm) chlorine).
- Surfaces should be cleaned of any soil before being disinfected.
- Food contact surfaces require a food safe/no rinse sanitizing solution on those surfaces (e.g., 100 ppm bleach).
  - 100 ppm bleach = 2mL of 5.25% bleach in 1L of water
  - If an outbreak is occurring, the concentration should increase to 200 ppm bleach = 4mL of 5.25% bleach in 1L of water

- In the presence of GI Illness:
  - 7% Accelerated Hydrogen Peroxide (AHP) mixed at a ratio of 1 part 7% AHP to 16 parts water - 1:16 (giving a 0.5% A.H.P. Solution),  
**OR**
  - Household bleach (5-6%) mixed at a ratio of 1 part bleach to 10 parts water - 1:10 (giving approximately 5000 parts per million (ppm) chlorine) can be used.
    - Quaternary ammonium (QUAT) is not effective against organisms such as noroviruses which are common causes of GI illness.

## Site Considerations

- Ensure supply of hand hygiene products and medical grade masks are available for clients and staff.
- Have an appropriate supply of personal protective equipment (PPE) for staff/volunteers that may be required to provide direct care to a symptomatic client (Appendix B).
- Identify a designated space for clients who develop or are exhibiting symptoms of illness to isolate away from others.
- Improve ventilation of indoor spaces by opening exterior doors and windows (natural ventilation) and by using mechanical ventilation such as an HVAC system to replace indoor air with outdoor air.

## Staff/Volunteers

If a staff or volunteer develops symptoms of respiratory or gastrointestinal illness at work, they should immediately:

- perform hand hygiene
- put on a mask if symptoms are respiratory in nature
- inform their supervisor
- avoid further client contact and leave as soon as it is safe to do so

## Clients

If a client develops respiratory or gastrointestinal symptoms, they should inform a staff member and be moved to a designated room.

- The client should put on a mask if symptoms are respiratory in nature (as able) until in their own room/space
- Staff/volunteers providing direct care to a symptomatic client will use appropriate PPE (Appendix B).
  - Direct care is defined as: providing hands-on care (e.g., bathing, washing, toileting, dressing, continence care, care of open wounds/lesions).
- Once the client has recovered (see below), they are then able to be a member of the general population and resume all normal activities.

**A client is deemed recovered when all of the following apply:**

- symptoms have been improving for at least 24 hours
- 48 hours since last occurrence of nausea, vomiting and/or diarrhea
- no fever for 24 hours
- has not developed any new symptoms

## Appendix A: Hand Hygiene

# How to wash hands with soap and water

For 15 to 30 seconds—steps 1 through 5



1. Wet hands with warm water



2. Apply enough soap to cover entire surface of hands



3. Vigorously rub soap palm to palm



4. Wash back of each hand with palm of other hand



5. Clean your wrists

Don't Forget—steps 6 through 8



6. Space between fingers



7. Thumbs



8. Fingertips



9. Rinse all aspects of hands under running water



10. Pat hands dry with disposable paper towel, then use towel to turn off faucet



11. Dispose of paper towel in waste basket

# How to Handrub?

RUB HANDS FOR HAND HYGIENE! WASH HANDS WHEN VISIBLY SOILED

**⌚** Duration of the entire procedure: 20-30 seconds



Apply a palmful of the product in a cupped hand, covering all surfaces;



Rub hands palm to palm;



Right palm over left dorsum with interlaced fingers and vice versa;



Palm to palm with fingers interlaced;



Backs of fingers to opposing palms with fingers interlocked;



Rotational rubbing of left thumb clasped in right palm and vice versa;



Rotational rubbing, backwards and forwards with clasped fingers of right hand in left palm and vice versa;



Once dry, your hands are safe.



World Health Organization

Patient Safety

A World Alliance for Safer Health Care

SAVE LIVES

Clean Your Hands

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## Appendix B: Precautions

Suspected or confirmed client with Respiratory Illness (Influenza-like Illness, Influenza, COVID-19) follow Contact/Droplet Precautions.

This includes the appropriate selection and use all of the following personal protective equipment (PPE) when providing direct care.

### Contact and Droplet Precautions

- Gloves
- Long-sleeved gown
- Facial protection, including **eye protection that is either a full-face shield that covers the front and sides of the face or well-fitting goggles**

If entering the room/space of a client symptomatic with respiratory illness but not providing direct care, the minimum PPE required is:

- Facial protection, such as a surgical/procedure mask and eye protection/ face shield.

Suspected or Confirmed Client with Gastrointestinal Illness follow Contact Precautions.

This includes the appropriate selection and use all of the following personal protective equipment (PPE) when providing direct care.

### Contact Precautions

- Gloves
- Long-sleeved gown- when contamination of clothing is possible
- *Surgical/procedure mask with eye protection/face shield to protect mucus membranes from exposure to viral particles when assisting someone who is actively vomiting, has explosive uncontained diarrhea or when cleaning an area grossly contaminated with vomit or feces.*



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### **Donning PPE Order**

1. Perform hand hygiene
2. Don gown
3. Apply mask (if applicable)
4. Apply face shield or goggles (if applicable)
5. Put on gloves

### **Doffing PPE Order**

1. Remove gown and gloves (can be removed together)
2. Perform hand hygiene
3. Remove face shield or goggles (if applicable) (do not touch the front)
4. If appropriate remove mask touching only the strings or ear loops (if applicable).
5. Perform hand hygiene

**\*All PPE should be removed before leaving the client's room and discarded into a no-touch receptacle\*.**