



## CLPHA COVID-19 Preparedness & Response Call

March 12, 2020 | 4:00 p.m. ET

### SUMMARY & NOTES

On March 12, CLPHA hosted a conference call featuring guests from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to discuss ways PHAs can prepare for, and respond to, potential COVID-19 outbreaks in their communities, including examples from member PHAs facing more advanced local situations. The call was open to CLPHA member PHA staff as well as our partners at the MTW Collaborative and their member PHAs. More than 115 people joined the call.

*(You can listen to a recording of the call by dialing 719-457-0820 and entering Replay Passcode 588037227.)*

On the call, we reviewed insights from our 3/9 call with PHA communications staff where we heard from Seattle Housing Authority and King County Housing Authority, who had each been working closely with the state and local health departments, developing internal policies to protect PHA staff safety and resident health (e.g. staff leave and teleworking policies), and identifying additional issues related to COVID-19 concerning PHAs (e.g. the need for potential regulatory relief for inspections to avoid putting inspectors or residents at work). A [call summary and notes](#) for the 3/9 call can be found on [CLPHA.org/COVID19](https://CLPHA.org/COVID19).

#### **CDC Official Remarks and Q&A**

CLPHA welcomed officials from the CDC's National Community Intervention Task Force, 2019 Novel Coronavirus Response, to share important public health messaging and answer questions CLPHA posed about guidance of interest to PHAs.

- **Importance of Local Health Departments:** CDC emphasized that the most important thing PHAs can do at the outset is connecting with their local public health departments as they will have the most up-to-date, localized guidance for PHAs to follow as things develop. COVID-19 outbreaks vary by city/area, which is why local authorities should be considered the top authorities for reliable public health guidance.
- **Guidance from CDC:** CDC officials also provided a broad overview of the guidance available from the agency at this time, including proper handwashing protocols, public space cleaning, staff safety measures, and needed supplies. They encouraged PHAs to attend to all common/community spaces to ensure hand soap is full, garbage cans are empty, tissues are available, etc. Additionally, they encourage PHAs to consult guidance about sanitizing these spaces on a regular basis.
- **Question about Age and Health Condition Risk Factors:** We know that COVID-19 puts people of advanced age at higher risk for developing severe cases, but another risk factor is having a chronic health condition (including respiratory conditions like asthma and COPD). The CDC emphasized that these two risk factors are distinct: Someone can be at risk if they have certain health conditions even if they are not of advanced age. This is notable for PHAs as people living in HUD-assisted housing exhibit higher than usual prevalence of asthma (among all ages) and COPD (adults and elderly).

- **Guidance for High-Density Senior Communities:** Given that the elderly are at high risk of severe cases of COVID-19, CLPHA asked if CDC planned to release guidance specific to high-density senior communities about COVID-19. CDC reported that they were working on guidance for senior housing, which should be released within the next week. For now, they advise PHAs to follow existing guidance as this new document would be building upon foundational knowledge.
- **Safety Equipment:** Like other community providers, PHAs have been working to protect staff that interact with the general public. The CDC advised against “stockpiling” supplies of any kind and discouraged the use of face masks or gloves given their limited effectiveness with non-healthcare workforces. Gloves, for example, provide a false sense of security without usage protocols (i.e. doctors and nurses are trained to use and dispose of gloves to maximize safety).

### **PHA Response Efforts**

In addition to the CDC’s remarks and Q&A, two CLPHA members shared examples of their current response efforts: The Housing Authority of the City of Saint Paul and Seattle Housing Authority. In addition to sharing their respective communications to staff and residents, they emphasized the pervading advice given on the 3/9 call that encouraged PHAs to follow health departments’ guidance. SHA offered some additional perspective about locations where the COVID-19 outbreak response has intensified. They noted that public health departments might be less available for direct collaboration as the COVID-19 situation intensifies. SHA is remaining in touch with public health officials through coordination calls and other means, but they said their level of engagement has changed since the beginning of the local response.

PHAs are starting to hear about confirmed cases of COVID-19 among their residents. They are being instructed to follow standard protocols to have those individuals self-quarantine in accordance with CDC guidance. The measures others in those buildings should take are the same as if they did not have any confirmed cases; the actions of the person with COVID-19 are the main variable to address in these scenarios. PHAs are actively working with residents and property management to address these situations.

**CLPHA will host our next COVID-19 call on Monday, March 16, at 1:00 p.m. ET, to discuss the forms of relief PHAs would find most beneficial during this public health crisis.** Forms of relief might include, but are not limited to, suspension of REAC inspections, extension of reporting requirement deadlines, recertification delays, and extensions for any required public meetings. As we advocate for these changes, CLPHA would like to hear from members about the most urgent needs. Please join us on Monday, March 16 at 1:00 p.m. ET.

#### **Member call on COVID-19 relief**

**Monday, March 16, 1:00 p.m. ET**

**Phone: 712-770-4212**

**Passcode: 917765#**

Please continue to share any resources your agency has to share by emailing [clpha@clpha.org](mailto:clpha@clpha.org) and be in touch with any questions you might have about COVID-19 that you would like us to help answer.

---

**Jenny Werwa, CLPHA**

- [Call summary and notes of 3/9 member call on COVID-19](#)

- Listen to recording of the call by dialing (719) 457-0820 and entering Replay Passcode 539016490
- Visit [CLPHA's COVID-19 webpage](#) for CLPHA member and CDC resources; page is being continuously updated with COVID-19 info and resources

#### **Steve Lucas, CLPHA**

- CDC will now offer public health guidance on COVID-19 for PHAs

#### **Rebecca Payne, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)**

- The first thing that our PHAs should be doing is connecting with state & local health officials – course and spread of the virus is diverse and unique to local areas
- CDC is past the point of taking a mitigation approach (e.g. trying to slow the spread of disease by investigating and tracing sick people)
- Trying to preserve healthcare and medical resources for those who need it most – many people will be able to recover completely at home
- Highest risk populations include older adults and individuals with other underlying conditions

#### **Samuel Crowe, CDC**

- CDC has [info on their website](#) that explains proper handwashing procedures and social distancing in order to stop the spread
- Also had [guidance on proper cleaning measures](#) once an exposure event has occurred for community spaces

#### **Steve Lucas, CLPHA**

- Existing CDC guidance indicates that those with multiple chronic conditions are at greater risk of COVID-19, especially those with respiratory health issues. This is of concern to PHAs because people living in HUD-assisted housing often exhibit higher rates of asthma (at all ages) and COPD (adults and elderly). Do we know if children, adolescents, and younger adults with asthma or other respiratory illnesses face a similar risk to older adults and the elderly, or is the risk significantly lower due to age?

#### **Sascha Ellington, CDC**

- Very few reports on clinical outcomes for children with COVID-19
- We are concerned about asthma as an underlying health risk condition for COVID-19 but we do not have data broken down by age about how COVID-19 affects kids vs. adults vs. elderly people with asthma
- CDC would consider individuals of all ages with asthma to be at risk for severe illness

#### **Steve Lucas, CLPHA**

- Is there specific guidance for those living with respiratory conditions to reduce their risks of exposure that can be conveyed to PHA residents writ large?

**Sasha Ellington, CDC**

- Preventive measures are the same for individuals with respiratory conditions but we do stress social distancing measures, limiting travel, etc. for these high risk individuals

**Rebecca Payne, CDC**

- PHAs can be helpful in spreading the word about hand hygiene and facilitating it – making sure that handwashing stations, tissues, etc. are put out and regularly replenished
- PHAs can work with local partners to bring in these supplies
- However, CDC does NOT recommend stockpiling
- We find that focusing on what you CAN do in these high anxiety times also helps mental health

**Rebecca Payne, CDC**

- In light of school closures we are NOT encouraging alternative gatherings (e.g. pop-up childcare), so PHAs can be helpful in not facilitating these group gatherings or allowing for more social distancing in such gatherings (e.g. timed entry, limited numbers, etc.)

**Steve Lucas, CLPHA**

- One question that we've received from several PHAs is what they can do to prepare for and respond to a local outbreak of COVID-19 within their senior high-rise buildings. These buildings sometimes have hundreds of elderly residents, a large percentage of whom are extremely low-income and often dependent on visiting services such as meal delivery. Both due to advanced age and health status, these residents could be particularly vulnerable to COVID-19, and their exposure to social service workers might not allow them to self-quarantine entirely. Outside of the existing nursing home guidance CDC has released, will the agency develop guidance specific to housing providers with large volumes of residents who might be at risk? In advance of any such guidance, what existing resources should PHAs consult to think through this challenge as they prepare for COVID-19?

**Samuel Crowe, CDC**

- CDC is working on a guidance document for senior living communities that will hopefully be out in the next few days
- If there was an exposure event in a senior facility we would encourage you to work with your state and local public health departments and have them guide you through that process
- PHAs can use [CDC's cleaning and disinfecting guidance for community spaces](#)

**Rhonda Rosenberg, KCHA**

- We have a lot of concerns regarding cleaning elevators since they are so highly used – advice?

**Samuel Crowe, CDC**

- We recommend routine cleaning of high traffic areas using our guidelines

- Encourage folks to stay home if their sick, use elbows, pens, etc. to hit buttons
  - If you must use your hands, use 60% alcohol sanitizer or wash your hands for 20 seconds after touching buttons and other high traffic surfaces, avoid touching your face

**Steve Lucas, CLPHA**

- PHAs have large numbers of staff who work on the frontlines in the community and visiting properties for property management, inspections, and other responsibilities. CLPHA has submitted questions to HUD about possible waivers of inspection requirements in the face of exposure risks, but this question is about best practices for frontline staff to protect themselves when visiting homes. What guidance would you give to PHAs as it relates to best safeguarding staff safety measures?

**Samuel Crowe, CDC**

- Masks and gloves can offer people who aren't trained health professionals who know how to wear them and put them on and off a false sense of security; CDC does not recommend wearing them as a preventive measure

**Steve Lucas, CLPHA**

- CLPHA members have implored each other to follow the lead of their local public health partners as it relates to COVID-19, remaining aware of changes and participating in any community-wide coordination efforts. Is there anything that PHAs should be preparing for in case the outbreak gets more intense in their community?

**Samuel Crowe, CDC**

- Key things are being in touch with your local health department, maintaining good hand hygiene, try to communicate with your residents as much as possible – via flyers, emails, etc.

**Steve Lucas, CLPHA**

- Anything we didn't touch on that the CDC would like to share with us?

**Samuel Crowe, CDC**

- Thank you for looking out for the health and safety of the people you serve
- Please refer to our handwashing and cleaning guidance

**Steve Lucas, CLPHA**

- Thank you to the CDC for all you've being doing during this time

**Jenny Werwa, CLPHA**

- Reminder: CLPHA will have member call on Monday, March 16 at 1:00 p.m. ET to discuss regulatory relief during COVID-19 crisis – [RSVP for the call here](#)
- Will now hear from St. Paul PHA on their [COVID-19 statement](#)

**Alicia Huckleby, St. Paul Public Housing Agency**

- We really wanted to get something out soon because we were getting questions from our staff and tenants
- We had been collecting statements that local entities had been sending out about COVID-19
- Wanted to stress that SPPHA is taking guidance from CDC and local public health departments and remind our tenants that the situation is ever-changing
  - View this statement as a working draft
- Sent statement out on Tuesday to all employees, posted on website along with CDC handouts
- On Friday, will be handing out flyers to all residents along with antibacterial soap to encourage handwashing
- Have posted CDC posters about stopping the spread of germs at all public housing sites
- Was able to find waterless hand soap with no-touch dispensers and have installed them at all sites; have enough backup supplies for 2-3 months
- Have had several conversations with employees to not report into work if they are sick
- Have also gotten the state's public health hotline number and shared it with staff
- Working with their storeroom to make sure that they are appropriately distributing personal protective equipment
- Also considering postponing their larger group meetings (e.g. resident meetings)

**Kerry Coughlin, Seattle Housing Authority**

- Our COVID-19 situation is quite advanced compared to the rest of the country and SHA is moving to much more escalated measures
- Cases appear to be doubling every day
- PHAs need to think about the scale of the problem and what they can do in this scale
- PHAs also need to come at this understanding the role of the PHA vs the role of public health and need to follow public health's lead
- Social distancing is mandatory in State of WA – no more gatherings of over 250 people, King County is going further to mandate 6 ft social distancing at all meetings, even small meetings
- All SHA staff are teleworking if they are able to do so
- No hope of getting supplies
- SHA has a positive case in one of their buildings – in light of HIPAA what can we, should we, and do we say to staff and residents? SHA is working through what is the right and legal thing to do
- Governor has just ordered all K-12 schools in the tri-county area – puts huge strain on workforce
  - Any type of leave can be used, not just sick leave
  - SHA relaxing rules that you can't care for children during telework
- Travel ban in place
- Because of the escalation in WA, SHA has discontinued REAC inspections and non-essential voucher inspections

**Steve Lucas, CLPHA**

- How did you learn of resident being tested positive?

**Kerry Coughlin, SHA**

- Resident notified SHA of his illness, said that he was ok and was self-quarantining in his unit with a month's supply of food
- We don't want to panic an entire building but we don't want to be irresponsible; however, we are giving the same instructions to all residents regardless of whether there is a positive case in the building or not
- Encourages PHAs to look at each other's websites

**Steve Lucas, CLPHA**

- Reminder to share your COVID-19 resources with CLPHA at [clpha@clpha.org](mailto:clpha@clpha.org)

**Brandon Wirth, Tacoma Housing Authority**

- To Kerry: how have you handled staff frustrations for individuals who cannot telework (e.g. rental assistance staff)?

**Kerry Coughlin, Seattle Housing Authority**

- Leadership has decided not to telework (unless they are sick) to show solidarity
- Offering staggered start times to keep people away from each other
- Sanitizing all door handles and other spaces

**Rhonda, King County Housing Authority**

- Working on modified office opening policy to reduce number of staff on site at a given time
- Working with school districts to make sure that kids get food since school is an important source of food for many kids

**Brandon Wirth, Tacoma Housing Authority**

- Tacoma considering turning school bus routes into food routes for people who rely on school lunches for food

**Kerry Coughlin, Seattle Housing Authority**

- As things have intensified, our public health department is really swamped and cannot react on a building to building basis

**Steve Lucas, CLPHA**

- Latest on testing in Seattle?

**Kerry Coughlin, Seattle Housing Authority**

- Testing is not being done for everyone, cannot keep up

- Asking people who are symptomatic to stay home and avoid hospitals, if they are not getting better or experiencing complications they are asking individuals to call their primary care providers first before going to the hospital

**Jenny Werwa, CLPHA**

- Thank you for submitting your resources, visit [alpha.org/covid19](https://alpha.org/covid19) for all resources and information