



CLPHA CWG COVID-19 Call Summary

March 9, 2020

On March 9, CLPHA's Communications Working Group held a conference call to discuss COVID-19 communications and operations plans at member PHAs. The call was open to PHAs' communications and other staff and more than 65 people participated in the call.

(You can listen to a recording of the call by dialing 719-457-0820 and entering Replay Passcode 539016490.)

The most important message from PHAs who participated on the call is that they are making their operations decisions based on information provided by the state and local public health agencies. In addition to following public health guidance, they are also participating in regular phone calls and meetings to ensure work is coordinated appropriately with the local public health agencies.

This was especially clear when hearing from Seattle Housing Authority and King County Housing Authorities, two agencies who spoke about their experiences in a city where there are a higher number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 and related deaths than other cities at this time.

Seattle's Kerry Coughlin outlined their work at SHA to educate residents and staff about COVID-19 and to practice social distancing whenever possible by encouraging staff telework and asking residents to communicate with PHA staff by phone or email whenever possible. SHA is communicating frequently with staff and residents via email, mail (though traditional mail is slow compared to how quickly new information is coming), posting in buildings, and on social media.

Jill Stanton from King County also discussed efforts to train and support maintenance staff who need to visit units where residents may be ill. She shared that KCHA is putting together protocols for maintenance and on-site staff when they go to units that will include asking, "has anyone in the household recently been sick with a cough or fever?" They also have a Chief Safety Officer on staff who is leadings trainings on using personal protective gear and other topics.

Many questions on the call were related to staff leave policies.

Regarding Staff Leave Policies:

- In Seattle, staff who are ill must take PTO, and they are not required to present a doctor's note. They are encouraging telework whenever possible, and they are offering bridge days for people who are out of leave days.
- In King County, KCHA is asking staff who have recently traveled overseas to take paid administrative leave for two weeks. This is only for staff who visited a Level 2 or 3 country affected by the virus. They are also allowing parents to telework or take leave if their children's school is closed.

Notes from the call are below and posted to CLPHA's COVID-19 resource page:

<https://clpha.org/covid19>.

The Communications Working Group will host another COVID-19 call on Thursday, March 12 at 4:00 PM.

3/12, 4 PM ET, CWG COVID-19 Call

Call Information:

719-867-1571

727212#

CLPHA CWG COVID-19 Call Notes 3.9.2020

To listen to a recording of the call:

Call-In: 719-457-0820

Replay Passcode: 539016490

Jenny Werwa, CLPHA

- Call Overview – Focus on Information Gathering
 - Scheduled this call to talk about PHA communications and operations steps members are taking in response to COVID-19
- CLPHA Resources: <https://clpha.org/covid19>
 - Contains CDC resources as well as handouts/documents from PHAs
 - Share your resources with jwerwa@clpha.org/kmackay@clpha.org
 - For questions about health partnerships or public health, contact CLPHA's Health Research and Policy Manager Steve Lucas at slucas@clpha.org
- Seattle-area member PHAs will now share their PHAs' COVID-19 plans

Kerry Coughlin, Seattle Housing Authority

- Have been coordinating with King County HA on their responses; have weekly check-in calls
- One of the most important things for them to emphasize early is the role of a PHA vs. the role of the public health department
 - This is a public health issue and the purview of the public health department, there is only so much the PHA can do in this situation
 - Encourages PHAs to participate in their local public health department calls on COVID-19
 - Important to take action based on public health guidelines and recommendations NOT based on reactions or demands from residents or other stakeholders
- Recommends stocking up supplies
- First thing they did was put out a memo to all staff stating that they should NOT come in to work if they're ill
- Taking social distancing measures to reduce the numbers of people in close proximity – having staff telework where possible

- Postponing all nonessential in-person meetings
- Asking residents to communicate with PHAs by phone or email if at all possible, but have not closed their offices or reducing their open hours
- Have trained staff on proper handwashing and sanitation procedures
- Cleaning SHA offices every day
- Communicating with residents frequently via email and social media
- Finds things are moving too fast to communicate via the mail
- Due to HIPAA, public health & health providers would not tell PHAs (or any landlord) if someone in their unit has been diagnosed with COVID-19
- Trying to delay deadlines or get temporary waivers on REAC inspections or anything that would require a staff member to enter a resident's unit
- Has not issued a travel ban at SHA, but asks SHA staff to only undertake essential travel
- Business continuity plan was already established at SHA but haven't had to use that yet

Steve Lucas, CLPHA

- Follow up question for Kerry: could you give us a sense of how testing for COVID-19 is working? Any mobile labs or nearby labs?

Kerry Coughlin, Seattle Housing Authority

- Not enough test kits in Seattle so public health is being very selective in who they test (have to have extenuating circumstances established beyond people just feeling ill), so there are no mobile labs

Steve Lucas, CLPHA

- Another thing covered by the media a lot is the proper use of face masks and education about whether or not to use them, is SHA handing down any guidance on this?

Kerry Coughlin, Seattle Housing Authority

- Public health has been imploring people not to use masks due to the shortage of them for health professionals and because they aren't effective
- SHA is not doing much with masks but if maintenance staff requests one because they have to go into a unit where someone is feeling ill, SHA will accommodate that

Greer McVay, Oakland Housing Authority

- If we are sending inspectors to people's homes, without violating residents' privacy rights, are there any questions that the PHA can ask?

Kerry Coughlin, Seattle Housing Authority

- We've been telling staff to use their own judgment but that they should not interrogate residents

- Note that it is unlikely that the resident would know if they had COVID-19 or not given how little people are being tested for it

Greer McVay, Oakland Housing Authority

- Thinking around PTO – policies for people who call out sick? What if they don't have leave? Do they need to get a doctor's note?

Kerry Coughlin, Seattle Housing Authority

- Not requiring a doctor's note, people who are ill must take PTO
- Allowing people to telework when possible
- SHA offering to bridge 5 days' gap between end of sick leave and beginning of FMLA coverage for staff who are sick and are out of sick leave

Jill Stanton, King County Housing Authority

- Asking staff who have recently traveled overseas to affected areas to take full two weeks at home, will be given paid administrative leave
- Has 6 person staff on COVID-19 that meets every morning; group answers staff questions via email and phone
- Putting together protocols for maintenance and on-site staff; protocol will allow for staff to ask questions that firefighters ask when they enter: "Has anyone in the household recently been sick with a cough or fever?"
 - Have further protocols based on the resident's response
- Also have a chief safety officer on staff

Cheryl Phillips, Lucas Metropolitan Housing Authority

- Is it possible to share KCHA administrative leave policy and maintenance staff protocol policies with the group

Jill Stanton, King County Housing Authority

- Only allowing administrative leave pay for those who have recently visited a Level 2 or 3 country affected by the virus, is not offering it to all staff
- Will share maintenance policy with group when it's ready

Jenny Werwa, CLPHA

- Will share the resource on www.clpha.org/covid19

Greer McVay, Oakland Housing Authority

- If there's a school closure – how do you handle employees who have kids who need to stay home?

Jill Stanton, King County Housing Authority

- One local school district went to online classes – allowing parents to either telework or take leave

Jenny Werwa, CLPHA

- Any PHAs have travel bans?

[multiple people said no]

Kerry Coughlin, Seattle Housing Authority

- To Jenny: any changes to CLPHA meeting

Jenny Werwa, CLPHA

- We are gathering information from you all and will let you know when we make a decision

Richard Archer, Norfolk Redevelopment & Housing Authority

- Questions for King County:
 - Your volunteer maintenance program that you mentioned, are you offering any hazard pay?
 - Have you changed policies around property management office since residents are free to walk in?
 - Have you asked for REAC inspection waivers like SHA?

Jill Stanton, King County Housing Authority

- Re: hazard pay: no, and they haven't asked yet but if they asked they would have to negotiate with the union
- Re: property management office: printing flyers about COVID-19 from the CDC and modifying them to be specific to KCHA, asking residents to not enter the building if they have symptoms
- Re: REAC inspections: we completed ours so it wasn't an issue

Jenny Werwa, CLPHA

- Note: HUD is putting together an FAQ for PHA executive directors and asked CLPHA to ask what questions member PHAs have, see our [member action alert today](#)

Kerry Coughlin, Seattle Housing Authority

- Have not closed their offices and is still allowing in-person resident visits, but is sending out communications to residents and voucher holders asking them to communicate over phone or email if possible

Jeff Horwich, Minneapolis Public Housing Authority

- To SHA & KCHA: policy around latex gloves? Wondering about front desk staff who handle IDs, etc.

Kerry Coughlin, Seattle Housing Authority

- Public health notes that gloves do little to stop the spread of disease, but as with face masks they permit on-site maintenance staff to use their judgement

Unknown

- Question about community rooms – our PHA has groups use their rooms to serve community meals, but they have since closed these community rooms due to concerns around gathering places and the spread of the virus – any advice on this?

Vivian Brady-Phillips, Jersey City Housing Authority

- JCHA also uses community rooms for this purpose, but public health in Jersey City has determined that it's not necessary yet to shut these initiatives down

Stella Madrid, Denver Housing Authority

- We are participants in ConnectHome USA – putting the CDC homepage prominently in their computer labs for residents to see

Steve Lucas, CLPHA

- Wants to emphasize that you should follow the CDC guidelines and advice of your local public health officials when it comes to determining how best to protect residents – for example, about whether to use masks or gloves
- Also wants to reiterate Kerry's initial point that the role of the PHA and the role of public health are very different

Kerry Coughlin, Seattle Housing Authority

- Agency is focused on reacting to what is happening now, not the "what ifs"

Steve Lucas, CLPHA

- Please refer to www.clpha.org/covid19 for our shared PHA resources and CDC materials

Jenny Werwa, CLPHA

- Next Communications Working Group call will be on Thursday, March 12 at 4:00 p.m. ET, will also focus on COVID-19