COVID 19: Public Health Guidance for Community Volunteers
March 24, 2020

As volunteers supporting seniors and others in community, you have an important role to play in preventing the spread of the novel COVID-19 virus.

Below are guidelines about hand washing, cleaning, and social distancing to use as you engage with seniors and others as a volunteer in community. These guidelines follow the direction set by the Provincial Health Officer for keeping seniors and our communities safe from COVID-19.

1. If you’re ill – stay at home

   The most important thing you can do to prevent the spread of COVID-19 to vulnerable people is to stay home if you are ill. If you have symptoms that suggest COVID-19 or any another illness, it is important that you stay home and take care of yourself first. If you are at all unsure of your health status, the BC Centre for Disease Control’s online assessment tool available at https://covid19.thrive.health/ is a valuable resource to help assess whether you should be staying home or not and for how long.

2. Practice Social Distancing

   It is important to keep the recommended distance between yourself and those you are visiting as much as possible – for the safety of volunteers, and the seniors and others receiving services.

   • Avoid all close greetings like hugs or handshakes.
   • Only enter a home if necessary. If you do enter a home, touch only the items and surfaces that are necessary.

3. Practice good hand hygiene

   Hands can pick up germs easily from anything they touch, and can spread those germs to objects, surfaces, food, and people. Handwashing with soap and water is a very effective way to reduce the spread of illness.
When sinks for hand washing are not available, use alcohol-based hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol (70% alcohol is even better). Read labels, and wash hands with sanitizer the same way you would wash with soap and water.

Seven steps to proper handwashing

1. Remove all rings, wedding bands and wrist watches.
2. Wet hands with warm running water.
3. Apply a small amount of liquid soap. Antibacterial soap is NOT required.
4. Rub hands together for at least 20 seconds (sing the ABCs). Rub palms, backs of hands, between fingers and under nails, creating a lather.
5. Rinse off all soap with running water.
6. Dry hands with a clean, disposable towel.
7. Discard the used towel in the waste container.

Volunteers should clean their hands:

• Before you enter a senior’s home, using alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
• Before handling food or preparing meals.
• Between handling raw and cooked food – cross-contamination is a risk.
• After handling items such as laundry or doing household cleaning.
• After handling garbage.
• Whenever hands are dirty.
• After you leave a senior’s home, using alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

Cough/sneeze etiquette:

• Cough and sneeze into your elbow or into a tissue.
• Discard used tissues promptly in an appropriate garbage container.

A note on the use of surgical/procedural masks

• Healthy individuals do NOT need to wear surgical/procedural masks for COVID-19.
• If you are unwell, please stay home.
4. Cleaning and disinfecting

Early evidence suggests COVID-19 can live on objects and surfaces from a few hours to days. Regular cleaning and disinfecting of objects and high-touch surfaces with regular household cleaners is very important for preventing the transmission of viruses.

- In your car, clean and disinfect high-touch surfaces such as handles and seatbelts after each use with alcohol wipes. Read the label for the correct contact time.
- For other surfaces, use water, household detergents and common disinfectant products. These products are effective for cleaning and disinfection in home settings.
- Empty garbage containers often.