UPDATED Interim Guidance for Emergency Group Lodging During the COVID-19 Pandemic

July 29, 2021

Introduction

With B.C.’s Restart Plan, the provincial state of emergency, and an increasing urgent need for safe shelter for wildfire evacuees, the following public health guidance has been developed to support local authorities, First Nations, Emergency Support Services and health authorities in planning for emergency group lodging, if necessary.

Ensuring safe and accessible shelter for British Columbians impacted by wildfires is a high priority. This updated guidance provides discretion and flexibility to local communities to meet the needs of evacuees they are hosting. When establishing group lodging, it is important to engage the local health authority to seek regionalized public health situational awareness and advice that is appropriate for the local situation. Certain regions may have local public health measures in place to respond to COVID-19 case counts.

In some contexts, shelter needs, smoke exposure, and COVID-19 considerations will require balanced discussions during planning for group lodging. Local authorities and First Nations are strongly encouraged to engage with their health authorities as group lodging plans are being developed. Please do so through established emergency management processes (e.g., local emergency operating centres (EOC) to the provincial regional emergency operating centre (PREOC)). The PREOC will have contact information for a Health Emergency Management BC or health authority lead in your area.

Key Components of Group Lodging to Reduce COVID-19 Risk

- **Sanitation:** [Regular cleaning and disinfection](https://www.ceph.org/cleaning) are essential to prevent the transmission of COVID-19 from contaminated objects and surfaces. Establish a schedule and have cleaning solutions on-hand so volunteers or staff can support this to occur.

- **Post information & signage:** Post reminders for [hygiene, masking, respiratory etiquette, respecting personal space](https://www.ceph.org/cleaning), and that being outdoors is safer (weather and air quality permitting). Should evacuees express an interest in being immunized while staying in the host community, raise awareness of vaccination opportunities by posting information about the [nearest available vaccination centre provided by the local health authority](https://www.ceph.org/cleaning) (during group lodging plan development).

- **Bed spacing:** Set up cots/mats based on 3.5 square metres (approximately 2.5 metres by 1.5 metres) or 40 square feet (8 feet by 5 feet) per person, if possible. A space of 0.75 metres (2.5 feet) between beds should be
maintained, and spacing for families (from one household) is advised to be within these standard guidelines. Temporary barriers between beds, such as curtains, can be considered to reduce droplet spread while sleeping and head-to-toe sleep arrangements may be applied. Where space permits, arrange beds at least two metres apart and head-to-toe.

- **Meal areas:** Set up enough tables and seating to reduce the likelihood of crowding evacuees. Consider staggering mealtimes to further reduce congestion. Provide hand washing stations or hand sanitizer dispensers where people pick up their food, including beverages, dishware and utensils. Clean and disinfect the area between meal service times in keeping with food safety guidance.

- **Personal hygiene:** Promote regular hand washing as it is one of the best ways to stop the spread of infections. Provide access to and regularly restock hand washing and sanitizing stations throughout the group lodging site. This includes plain soap and water and/or hand sanitizer with a minimum of 60% alcohol. Please note that antimicrobial soap is not required for COVID-19.

- **Masks:** Mask wearing is recommended for people 12 years and older, particularly for those who are not fully vaccinated, (e.g., not 14 days after receiving their second dose of vaccine). Provide access to masks when entering group lodging, if possible.

- **Physical distancing:** Although no longer a requirement, it may still allow staff, volunteers, and evacuees to feel more comfortable. Consider continuing to practice physical distancing and use barriers if it does not negatively impact your operations or relationships, especially in shared spaces. Physical distancing is established by providing a two metre (six foot) distance between people or by providing a barrier that stops the transmission of respiratory droplets from one person to another.

- **Screening:** Ask all individuals entering the group lodging site to conduct an online self-assessment using the B.C. self-assessment tool. If the self-assessment provides a result that recommends testing for COVID-19 visit the BC COVID-19 Collection Centres website to find the nearest COVID-19 testing centre to book an appointment.

- **Encourage self-monitoring:** Everyone should self-monitor for signs and symptoms of COVID-19 (e.g., cough, fever, shortness of breath).
  - Evacuees diagnosed with COVID-19 or those in isolation, quarantine or advised by public health to self-monitor for symptoms (e.g., notified they may have been exposed to a confirmed case) should not be housed in group lodging. Instead, safe, individual accommodation is recommended. See the ESS Health Evacuation Guidance for additional details.
  - Should an evacuee develop symptoms, they should be isolated from others immediately in a pre-designated area within the group lodging site. They should be asked to wear a mask and visit the BC COVID-19 Collection Centres website to find the nearest COVID-19 testing centre to book an appointment. Arrangements should be made in consultation with local public health about requirements for those who may develop symptoms while in group lodging and then again regarding an individual's care and accommodation if someone were to develop symptoms.
  - Evacuees are encouraged to call 8-1-1 to self-report changes in health conditions.
  - For any suspected communicable disease incident at a group lodging site, with multiple symptomatic cases, the group lodging manager should report the incident to the local authority or First Nation EOC for escalation to the local health authority.

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1 ESS Group Lodging Operational Guidelines (2010), pg. 3-33
Resources

- **ESS Group Lodging Operational Guidelines**: Provides standard operations suggestions and support.
- **COVID-19 guidance for ESS responders**: Provides suggestions when providing emergency support services during COVID-19.
- **Cleaning and disinfectants for public settings**: Guidance available on the BC Centre for Disease Control’s [website](#).
- **Public Health Guidelines: Major Planned Events**: Provides guidance on drinking water, safe food, sanitation, waste management, harm reduction and overdose response.
- **Province-wide restrictions**

Posters

- **Consider others, keep wearing your mask, and golden rules for everyday life posters**
- **Hand hygiene poster**
- **Hand sanitizer poster**
- **How to wear a face mask poster** (how to put on and take off a mask)
- **Do not enter if you are sick or required to self-isolate poster**

COVID-19 information

- **How to get vaccinated for COVID-19**
- **COVID-19 vaccines**
- Useful resources on the BCCDC’s [website](#) and HealthLink BC’s [website](#)
- **Vax for BC**