

AHS Guidance for Local Authority Evacuation in a COVID-19 Environment

Supporting Local Response to a Community Evacuation

Alberta Health Services (AHS) is committed to supporting a Local Authority's response to a community evacuation by providing timely and appropriate services. Recognizing that evacuations occurring during the provincial response to COVID-19 require additional guidance and support from AHS, this document is intended to serve as a supplement to the AHS [Reception Centres: A Guide for Municipalities](#) document. The purpose of this supplementary document is to provide:

- Guidance regarding the process to notify AHS and to request AHS support.
- Supplementary guidance for local authorities identifying, planning for and operating reception centres in a COVID-19 environment, and;
- Supplementary guidance around health supports for community evacuations in a COVID-19 environment.

Notifying and Requesting Support from AHS

When an evacuation is occurring or expected to occur, local authorities may notify AHS:

- By contacting AHS Emergency/Disaster Management via the Single Point of Contact at **1-844-755-1788** or edp@ahs.ca, or;
- Through the Health Duty Desk at the Provincial Operations Centre, or;
- Through existing local communication channels/processes established in advance of the evacuation (e.g. municipal EOC connection to AHS zone EOC).

Once AHS has been notified of the evacuation, AHS will work to determine impacts on the health of the population and AHS facilities/services, and will work with the local authority to determine how AHS will support the evacuation.

Guiding Principles for Reception Centres in a COVID-19 Environment

The key environmental public health principles and requirements provided in the [Reception Centres: A Guide for Municipalities](#) document continue to apply in a COVID-19 environment. Additionally, local authorities should:

- Select lodging options that promote physical distancing between evacuees (e.g. hotels/motels, dormitories).
 - Group lodging (e.g. cots in a large open space where bathrooms and eating areas are shared) should be considered only as a last resort. Where local authority planning indicates that group lodging will be required to accommodate evacuees, AHS should be engaged early in the planning process to provide specific guidance.
- Where possible and appropriate, identify multiple lodging options to separate evacuees based on both COVID-19 risk and levels of health/social services needs. Consider appropriate accommodations for:
 - Individuals and families who have no symptoms and are not required to self-isolate;

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- Individuals and families who are required by Chief Medical Officer of Health (CMOH) order to self-isolate because they have COVID-19 symptoms; have tested positive for COVID-19; are close contacts of confirmed cases; or because they have returned from travel outside of Canada (hotel accommodation should be prioritized for this group wherever possible);
 - Individuals and families with higher levels of health needs and vulnerability to COVID-19 because of age or pre-existing health conditions;
 - Individuals and families with higher levels of health and social service needs because of homelessness or housing insecurity, and;
 - Other community-specific, needs-based categories.
- Register evacuees either virtually (by phone/online) or using a drive-through model that allows evacuees and registration staff to maintain physical distancing throughout the registration process.
 - Work with local social service providers to develop processes to allow evacuees to access services virtually or physically distanced, wherever possible. This includes: food, laundry, waste services, pet services, aids to daily living and wellness supports.

Planning Considerations

AHS recommends that Local authorities implement an evacuation process that assumes *any* resident could potentially present a risk of COVID-19 transmission. Wherever possible, local authorities should provide transportation, accommodation and other evacuation supports in a way that maintains physical distance between evacuees and incorporates other precautions (e.g. Personal Protective Equipment/PPE) where physical distancing is not possible.

When it is not feasible for the Local Authority to implement the recommended evacuation approach, a process must be established to ensure that individuals who are required to isolate are able to access appropriate transportation, accommodation and other supports that allow them to continue to isolate from others during the evacuation. These individuals should not use shared transportation (e.g. bus) unless masked, and should not be placed in group lodging where bathrooms and eating areas may be shared. Where the Local Authority has incorporated higher-risk transportation and accommodation options into evacuation planning, AHS should be consulted early in the planning process to provide guidance and support on minimizing the risk of COVID-19 transmission in these environments.

When advised by the local authority of available supports for individuals under isolation, AHS Public Health will provide this information to cases and contacts as part of regular public health follow-up. However, it is important to note that there will be other individuals residing in the community who are legally required to isolate due to symptoms or travel history and who will *not* be known cases/contacts under public health surveillance. The Local Authority should ensure that information is publicly available on how these individuals should access appropriate supports, such as a phone number to call or a specific location to report to for accommodation.

AHS Public Health Follow-up with COVID-19 cases/contacts

AHS will continue to provide COVID-19 case/contact investigation and ongoing monitoring and surveillance during and leading up to an evacuation. Local authorities must provide information to enable AHS to complete required public health follow-up with known cases and contacts.

When a local authority believes a community is at risk of evacuation, or a voluntary evacuation order has been issued, they should provide AHS Public Health with the following information:

- A list of the affected communities, including as much specific detail as possible (e.g. expected boundaries of evacuation area or a list of impacted neighbourhoods).
- A list of evacuation supports available to individuals who are required to isolate or quarantine, including:
 - Location where they should evacuate to and any specific instructions for registration, if the local authority has designated a specific location or process for individuals who are required to isolate or quarantine;
 - Transportation supports available to individuals who are physically able to evacuate without health assistance, but do not have a vehicle or other appropriate private transportation;
 - A phone number to contact the Local Authority with non-health questions or if specific non-health supports are required to safely evacuate and relocate (e.g. accommodation, transportation, personal services, etc.).

When a voluntary or mandatory evacuation order has been issued and evacuated individuals have registered with the Local Authority, provide AHS with the following information as soon as possible to enable AHS Public Health to follow-up with evacuated cases/contacts (where follow-up is required) within 12 hours of evacuation:

- Names (including individuals/families/groups that reside together)
- Mailing addresses, including postal code where they usually reside
- Name and address of the place where they are presently re-located to during the evacuation
- Telephone number where they can be reached while evacuated.

Responding to Evacuee Health Needs

AHS support for evacuee health needs will be based upon the nature of the event and available community capacity. In some cases, the health needs of evacuees can be met with existing community resources. Where required and appropriate, AHS may provide:

- Evacuee health screening guidance or support;
- Referral and general healthcare wayfinding to connect individuals and families with appropriate health services within the community, and;
- On-site health services including medical assessment and treatment and, if appropriate, COVID testing or referral.

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Where possible, AHS will also make arrangements directly with existing clients (e.g. home care, addiction and mental health) to facilitate access to required services during the evacuation.

In the COVID-19 environment, many areas of AHS are operating with reduced staffing availability. This may impact the ability of AHS to provide health services during evacuation.

Congregate Living/Health Facility Evacuation

When engaging in evacuation planning with congregate lodging facilities (e.g. shelters, group homes, lodges), local authorities must also consider that in the COVID-19 environment, neighboring facilities that are experiencing an outbreak will not be able to accept evacuated residents/clients. This may limit options for some local authorities, requiring additional planning to identify multiple alternate receiving facilities that can provide an appropriate level of care. Refer to the list of [Outbreaks in Alberta](#) for more information (updated on Tuesday and Friday each week).

In the event that evacuation of an AHS-operated health facility is required, AHS will coordinate the transportation and relocation of patients and clients. AHS sites will work directly with local authorities to identify and coordinate required supports.

Accessing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to support Evacuation

Physical distancing measures should be incorporated into evacuation planning as the most important measure local authorities can take to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission during the evacuation process. In the event that physical distancing measures are not possible (e.g. during bus transportation), local authorities may need to provide PPE to responders and evacuees to support a safe evacuation.

Local authority requests for PPE should be submitted to the Provincial Operations Centre (POC) using the online form established for this purpose: <https://xnet.gov.ab.ca/ppe>.

In the event PPE is urgently required and POC is not able to fulfill the request, AHS support may be requested via the Health Duty Desk at the POC or via the AHS Zone Emergency Operations Centre.

Disclosure of Health Information

AHS must adhere to the confidentiality provisions of Alberta's privacy laws and the *Public Health Act*, which prevents disclosure of individual health information, such as COVID-19 status, "in any manner that would be detrimental to the personal interest, reputation or privacy of the patient."

AHS would not disclose the COVID-19 status of an individual or group of individuals based on the risk of unknowingly coming into contact with someone who has tested positive with COVID-19. Measures to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19, including physical distancing and other precautions (e.g. PPE) should be implemented regardless of known risk, given that there may also be individuals who are COVID-19 positive and unaware, or individuals who are pre-symptomatic and capable of transmitting COVID-19.

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Resources

The following resources are available to help guide local authorities in planning for evacuation in a COVID-19 environment:

- AHS Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) Resources: <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/info/Page6422.aspx>
- AHS “Reception Centres: A Guide for Municipalities” Guidance Document: <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/wf/eph/wf-eph-reception-centres-municipalities.pdf>
- AHS “Shelter Guidance: Preventing, Controlling and Managing COVID-19”: <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/info/ppih/if-ppih-covid-19-outbreak-shelter.pdf>
- Government of Alberta “Guidance for Hotels, Motels, Bed & Breakfasts and Vacation Rentals”: <https://www.alberta.ca/assets/documents/covid-19-relaunch-guidance-hotels-motels.pdf>
- Government of Alberta “Standards for Commercial Accommodation during COVID-19”: <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/b39bbc91-eb87-459b-8cb0-24c4aaebca4e/resource/fc2cfebc-edb7-4f6e-bc70-0899b38c6424/download/health-cmoh-directive-d3-2020-health.pdf>
- Government of Alberta “COVID-19 Outbreaks In Alberta”: <https://www.alberta.ca/covid-19-alberta-data.aspx#p25721s5>
- Provincial Operations Centre (POC) PPE Request Form: <https://xnet.gov.ab.ca/pppe>