



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

December 20, 2021

### Introduction

In light of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the following public health guidance has been developed to support First Nations, Local Authorities, Emergency Support Services, and health authorities in planning for Group Lodging facilities.

Ensuring safe and accessible shelter for British Columbians impacted by wildfires, floods, and other disasters is a high priority. This updated guidance provides discretion and flexibility to communities to meet the needs of individuals they are hosting. It is acknowledged that Group Lodging facilities may need to be established quickly in response to sudden-onset events and that this process can be intensely stressful. Local health authorities are an important source of guidance and support. 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 additional local public health measures in place in response to COVID-19 case counts.

First Nations and Local Authorities 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 are essential to prevent the transmission of COVID-19 from contaminated objects and surfaces. Establish a schedule and have [appropriate cleaning solutions](#) on-hand so volunteers or staff can support regular cleaning and disinfection. More frequent cleaning of high touch surfaces, such as garbage can lids, doorknobs, and light switches is recommended.
- **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:** Ensure that [current guidance](#) on masking is fully implemented. At present, masks are required for everyone aged 5 and older in all indoor public settings and should be worn in common areas of the reception site. Masks may be removed while eating, drinking, and sleeping.



- **Ventilation:** A well-ventilated environment will limit transmission of some communicable diseases, such as influenza and COVID-19. If conditions permit, outdoor settings are safer than indoor, (e.g., meal areas and, play areas for children).
- **Respect personal space:** Respecting personal space should be encouraged, and the Group Lodging facility arranged to promote this protective behaviour where possible, (e.g., bed spacing and, staggered mealtimes).
- **Bed spacing:** For household groups, 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.<sup>1</sup> If possible, space bed groupings, i.e., bed groups for each household, by at least two metres. Temporary barriers between beds, such as curtains, can also be considered to reduce droplet spread while sleeping and head-to-toe sleep arrangements may be applied.
- **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.
- **Post information & signage:** Post reminders for key public health measures such as [hand hygiene](#), [masking](#), and [respecting personal space](#). Should individuals express an interest in being immunized while staying in the host community, raise awareness of vaccination opportunities by posting information about the how to register for an [appointment online](#) or by phone (1-833-838-2323).
- **Meal areas:** Set up enough tables and seating to reduce the likelihood of crowding. 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](#).
- **Encourage self-monitoring:** Everyone should self-monitor for [signs and symptoms of COVID-19](#) (e.g., cough, fever, shortness of breath).
  - Individuals 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 a Group Lodging facility. Instead, safe, individual accommodation is recommended. See the [Emergency Support Services \(ESS\) Program Health Evacuation Guidelines for COVID-19](#) for additional details.
  - Should an individual develop symptoms, they should be isolated from others immediately in a pre-designated area within the Group Lodging facility. 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 facilities, and then again regarding an individual's care and accommodation if someone were to develop symptoms.
  - Individuals should be encouraged to call 8-1-1 if their health condition worsens.
  - 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 First Nation EOC or Local Authority for escalation to the local health authority.

<sup>1</sup> [ESS Group Lodging Operational Guidelines](#) (2010), pg. 3-33



## Resources

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### Emergency Support Services

- [ESS Group Lodging Operational Guidelines](#): Provides standard operations suggestions and support.
- [Emergency Support Services \(ESS\) Program Health Evacuation Guidelines for COVID-19](#): Provides suggestions when providing emergency support services during COVID-19.

### Posters

- [Golden rules for everyday life posters](#)
- [Hand hygiene](#)
- [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

- [Indigenous COVID-19 Resources](#)
- [BC Centre for Disease Control](#) website.
- [Public Health Guidelines: Major Planned Events](#): Provides guidance on drinking water, safe food, sanitation, waste management, harm reduction and overdose response.
- Information on [provincial and regional restrictions](#).
- [How to get vaccinated for COVID-19](#)
- [COVID-19 vaccines](#)
- [HealthLinkBC](#) website

