

COVID-19 and Homeless Urban Indians

Urban Indian Health Institute / Chief Seattle Club
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Objectives

- Provide information on COVID-19
- Describe unique challenges facing homeless individuals in a COVID-19 outbreak
- Discuss lessons learned from on-the-ground homeless service provider
- Provide key recommendations for homeless service agencies:
 - Before an outbreak
 - During an outbreak
 - After an outbreak
- Q&A

What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 (2019 Novel Coronavirus) is a viral respiratory illness caused by a coronavirus that has not been found in people before. It can lead to lower respiratory illnesses like pneumonia and bronchitis.¹



What is the current status of COVID-19?

Current case counts

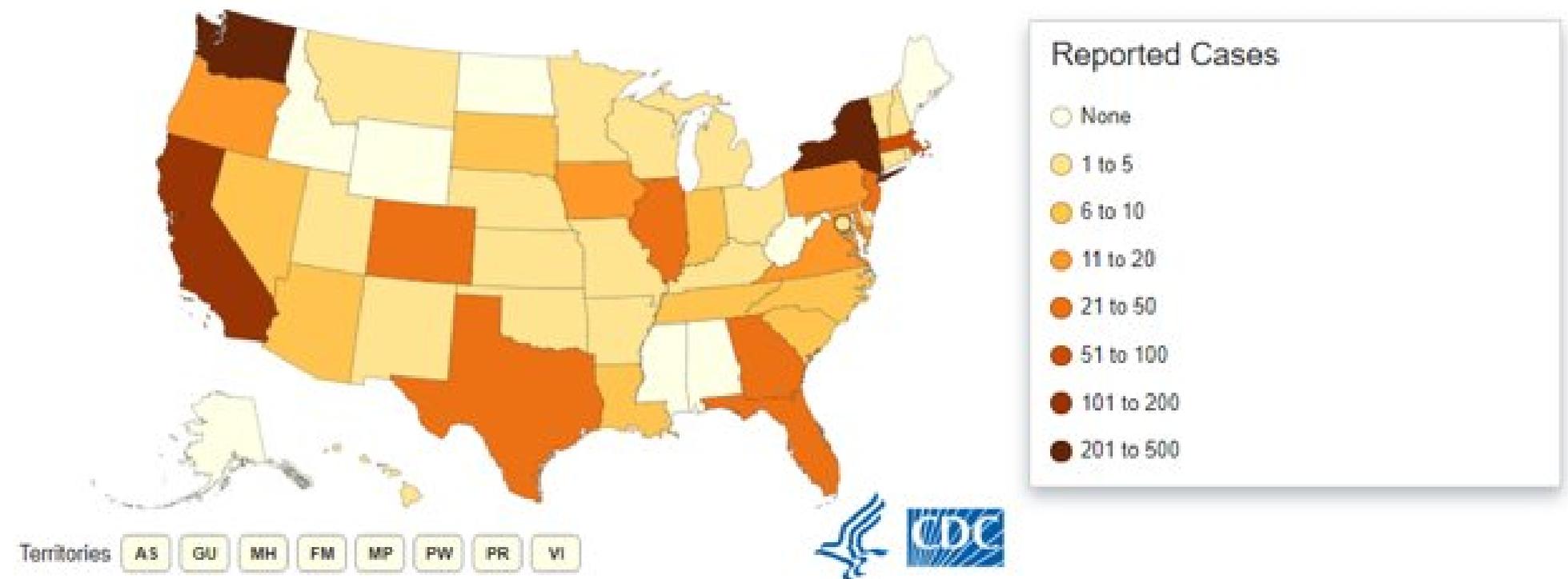
Global ²

- Total Cases: 209,839
- Deaths: 8,778

United States ³

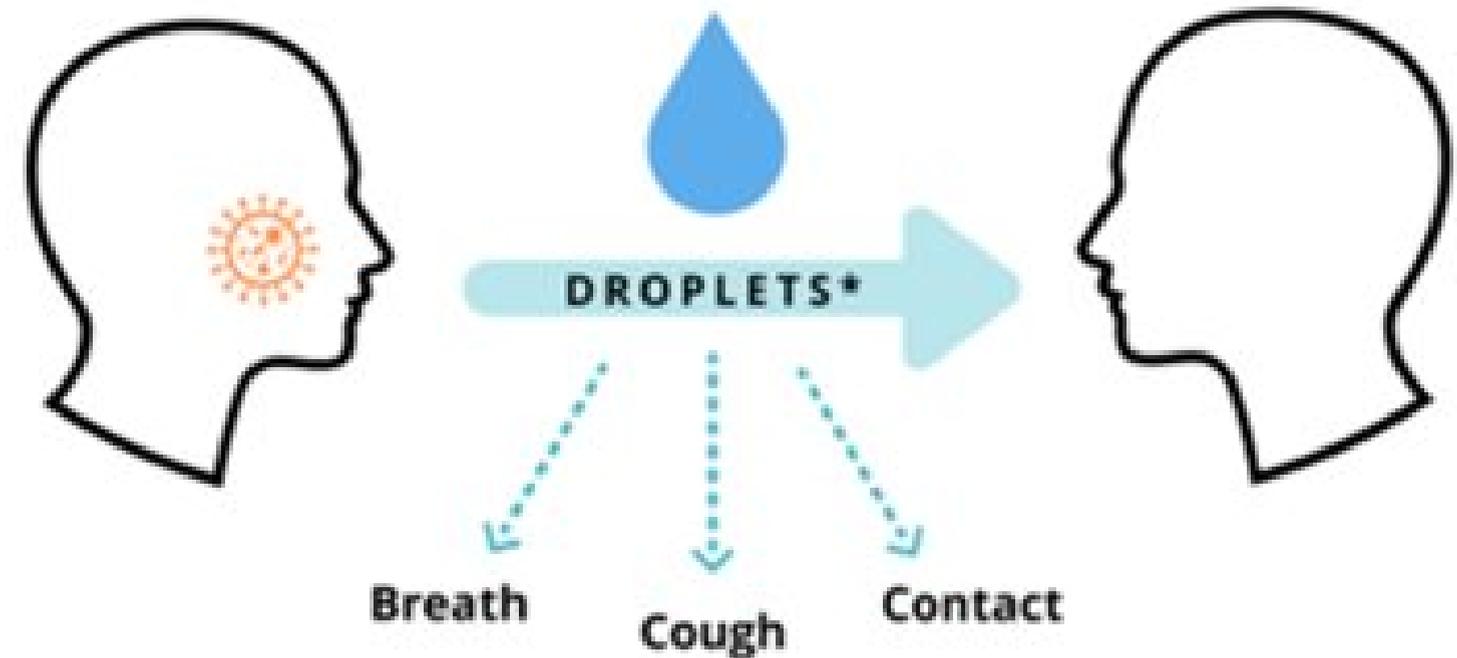
- Total Cases: 10,442
- Deaths: 150

States Reporting Cases of COVID-19 to CDC*

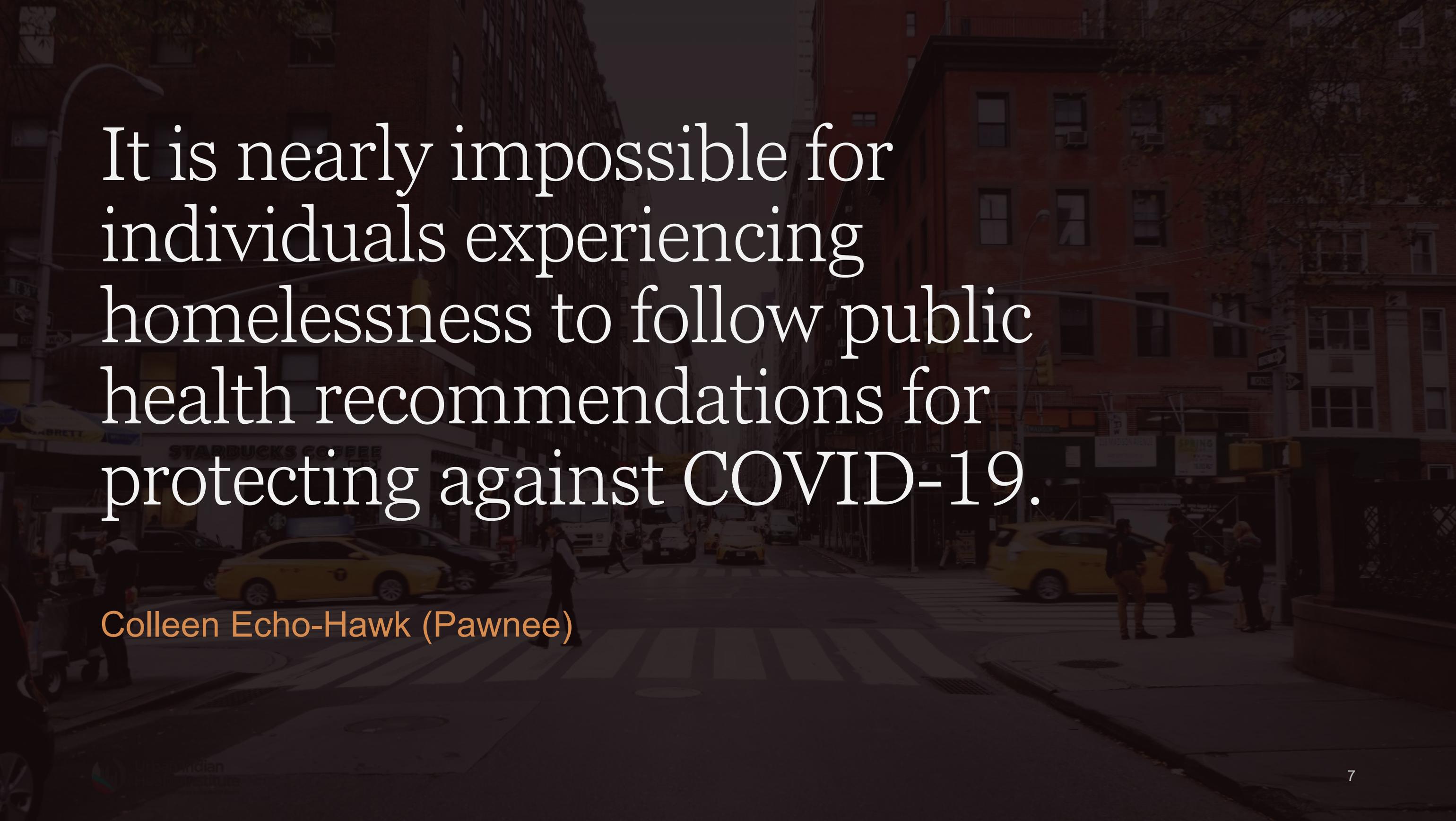


How is COVID-19 spread? ¹

- Through person-to person spread
- Between people who are in close contact with one another (within 6 feet)
- Spread from contact with contaminated surfaces or objects



** Droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs.*



It is nearly impossible for individuals experiencing homelessness to follow public health recommendations for protecting against COVID-19.

Colleen Echo-Hawk (Pawnee)

Unique challenges for homeless individuals ⁴⁻⁷

- They have limited access to soap and water, hand sanitizer, and wipes.
- They are unlikely to have a primary care doctor or health insurance.
- Encampments and shelters can be overcrowded.
- Tight-knit family and support groups can spread the virus faster.
- There is a lack of ability in a shelter to self-quarantine or to recover from an illness.
- Frequent movement makes treatment difficult and can increase exposure of others.
- They may have underlying health conditions.
- If currently employed, they may lack access to sick leave or job protection.

Lessons learned from an urban Indian homeless organization

The Indigenous people of this Country have the highest rates of homelessness



60% of the homeless population in Anchorage, Alaska are Alaska Native



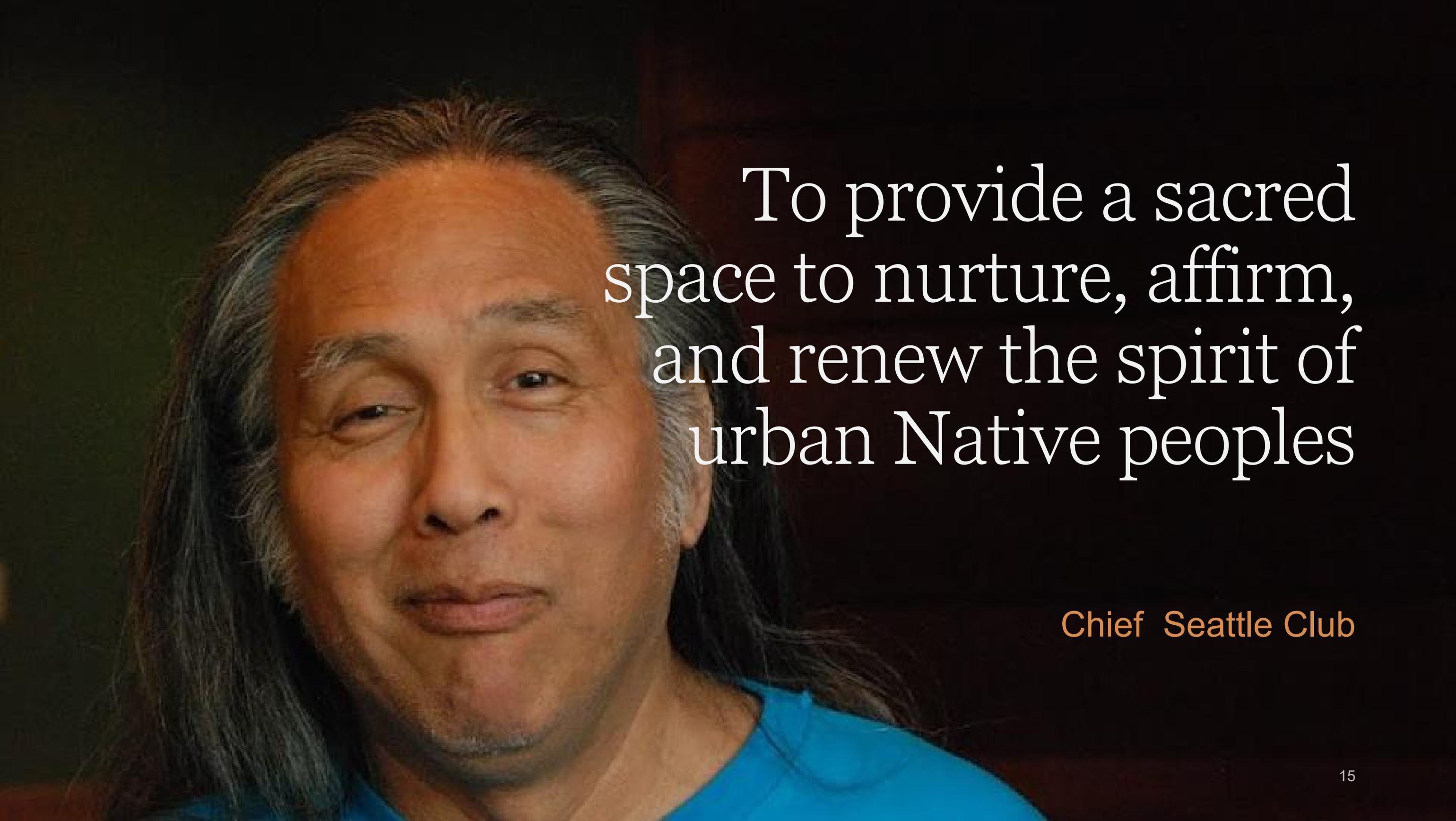
Our Native relatives
are **27.1x** more likely
to be homeless in
Minneapolis



10% of the homeless population in Seattle are Native





A close-up portrait of a man with long, straight grey hair, looking slightly to the right of the camera. He has a neutral expression and is wearing a bright blue t-shirt. The background is dark and out of focus.

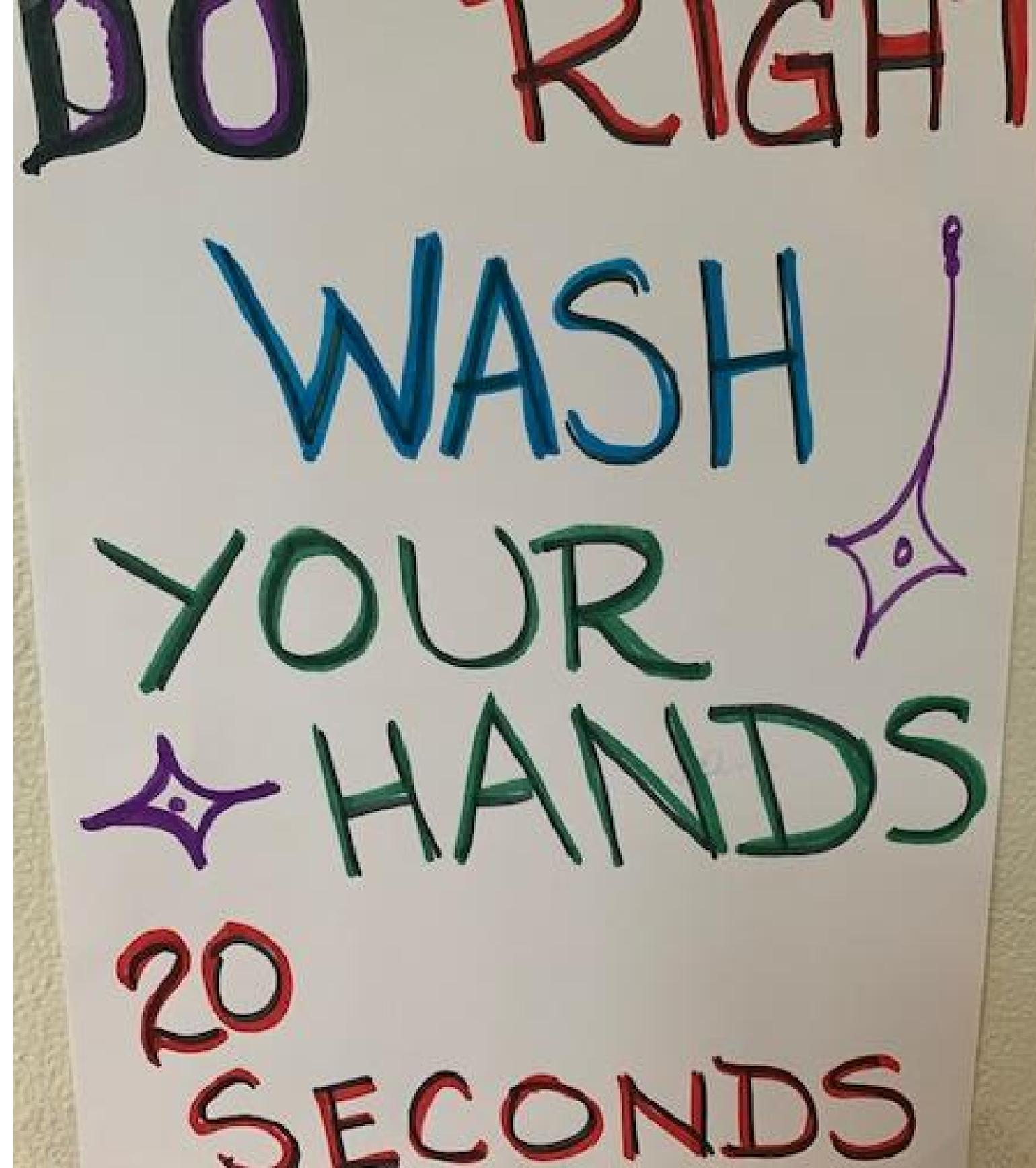
To provide a sacred
space to nurture, affirm,
and renew the spirit of
urban Native peoples

Chief Seattle Club



Communication

Use as many methods as possible and keep sharing.



Communication

Remember traditional medicines
– take a deep breath and ask for
ancestral wisdom



OFFER Assurance AND SUPPORT BEFORE YOU SCREEN

Screening

- Do you have shortness of breath?
- Are you coughing?
- Do you have a fever?
- Would you like us to check for fever?
- Have you been exposed to Covid-19?



After Screening

- Masks
- Quarantine
- Social Isolation
- Transportation to clinic or hospital
- Stick with your relative



Be focused on trauma resilience

- Tone of voice
- Assure that they are in a safe place
- Be ready to offer medical resources
- Be ready to listen
- Offer information
- Encourage
- Be gentle



Risk reduction plan

- Move chairs and tables
- Model physical distancing
- Consider moving your services to areas with better ventilation
- 6 feet is best
- Consider reduction of hours
- Reduce cross contamination
- Reduce hours that staff are in contact with your clients
- Stagger meal times

Innovate and Evolve!

- Move people into motels
- Understand food systems and adapt
- Traditional medicines



Infection control recommendations for homeless service agencies

Before an outbreak ^{4,5,8}

- **Create a Plan**
 - [CA State Guidance for Homeless Assistance Providers on COVID-19](#) ⁸
- **Anticipate Staff Challenges**
 - Plan for staff and volunteer absences.
 - Train staff and volunteers on the emergency preparedness plan and proper procedures.
- **Client Management**
 - Identify high-risk clients.
 - Designate separate room(s) and bathroom(s) if available.
 - Plan for higher usage during the outbreak.

During an outbreak^{4–6,8–10}

- Keep sick and high-risk staff and volunteers out of the agency and away from clients.
- Minimize face-to-face interactions with sick clients.
- If caring for sick clients, use personal protective equipment if available (facemask, gloves, gown).
- Limit visitors.
- Frequently clean and disinfect all common areas.

Outreach workers ⁹

- Continuation of outreach may depend on staffing needs at facility.
- Know the signs and symptoms of COVID-19.
- Avoid close contact (within 6 feet).
- Refer sick people to testing and medical care, per public health instructions.
- Use protective equipment (gloves, masks, etc.) for situations where unable to maintain distance.
- Wash hands frequently.

DURING AN OUTBREAK

For all clients 4–6,8–10

- At check-in, screen for symptoms using public health standards.
- Space out sleeping arrangement.
- Provide proper trash disposal.
- Monitor high-risk clients; reach out regularly.
- Avoid congregating large groups; stagger meals or common room access.
- Wash hands at entry and have hand sanitizer at key points in facility.
 - Stock bathrooms and sinks with hand soap.

Clients with symptoms ^{4–6,8,9}

- Give a mask to cover nose and mouth immediately.
- Isolate in an individual room if possible.
- Follow local public health guidance on getting client access to testing.
- Try to prevent movement around facility.
- Designated sites for isolation may be full or overwhelmed.
 - Local public health may have additional sites (e.g. hotels) for isolation.

DURING AN OUTBREAK

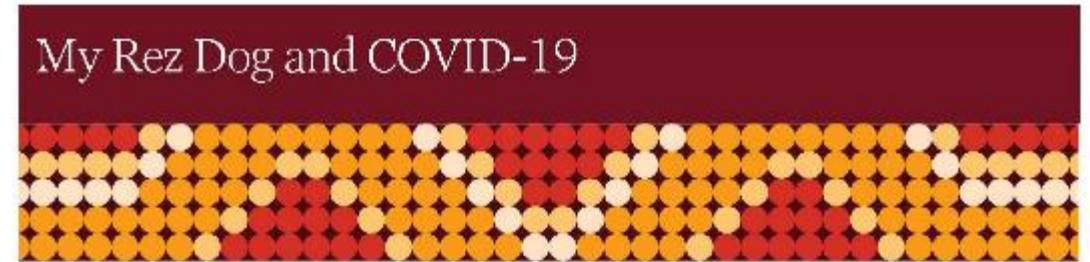
Harm Reduction Strategies

- Harm reduction refers to policies and practices that aim to reduce the harm associated with behaviors that individuals are unable or unwilling to stop.
 - The focus is on the prevention of harm to the best of your ability

DURING AN OUTBREAK

Pet care ^{10,11}

- Sick individuals are recommended to not have contact with animals.
- Have a plan for pet care and management if the owner requires medical attention.
- If client is experiencing symptoms, recommend frequent hand washing before and after touch their pet'
- Suggest sleeping 6 feet away from pets



How can I keep my pets safe during the COVID-19 outbreak?

If you or a family member have confirmed or suspected coronavirus disease (COVID-19) here are some helpful tips to keep care of yourself and your pets:

- You should restrict contact with pets and other animals while sick.
- When possible, have another person care for your animals while you are sick.
- If you must care for your pet, wash your hands before and after you interact with pets and wear a facemask
- Have your pet sleep at least 6 feet away

Everyday healthy pet care suggestions



Feed pets on a set schedule and make sure they have access to water, shelter, and exercise



Do not feed pets human food, raw pet food, or treats that aren't fully cooked (e.g. pig ears)



Clean pet food and water bowls daily



Store pet food in rodent-proof containers and use a scoop (not your hands) to fill bowls



Do not allow pets in food preparation or eating areas



Wash your hands with soap and warm water after petting, feeding, and cleaning up after your pet

Information from

Health care services for people living homeless. (2018, December). Retrieved from <https://www.kingcounty.gov/depts/health/locations/homeless-health.aspx>

Environmental Health Services Division of Seattle & King County Public Health Department. Stay Safe & Healthy. Toolbox for Facilities & Communities That Serve People Experiencing Homelessness.

Prepared by Urban Indian Health Institute, a division of Seattle Indian Health Board

Published March 19, 2020

AFTER THE OUTBREAK

Follow-up^{4,5,12}

- **Remember: the COVID-19 outbreak could last a long time and considerably impact your facility.**
- Talk with clients and staff to evaluate your plan of action.
- Continue practicing everyday preventive actions.
- Maintain and expand emergency planning.
- Allow time for mourning and grief for any deaths or illnesses that occur

Public Health Policy Recommendations

- Prioritize homeless people during outbreak.
 - CA Gov. Newsom announced the intent to do so
- Prioritize homeless individuals for quarantine facilities.
- Allocate response funds for non-standard equipment such as, mobile handwashing stations, access to PPE, etc.
- Have dedicated public health nurses for facilities during outbreak.

Questions?

We've provided resources for community at uihi.org/covid

Citations

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11. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2020). Animals and COVID-19. Retrieved from: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/animals.html>
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**Find more COVID-19
resources and stay up-to-date
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