

SYNOPSIS

04/24/2020

Review of “COVID-19 outbreak among three affiliated homeless service sites — King County, Washington, 2020”

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One-Minute Summary

- After a case of COVID-19 was confirmed in a resident at a homeless shelter in King County, Washington on March 30, 2020, active case finding activities were conducted at that shelter and two shelters that used that shelter’s day centre service.
- COVID-19 was confirmed in **35/195 (18%) residents** and **8/38 (21%) staff members**:
 - **19/43 (44%)** cases were identified in the first round of testing conducted at the shelters shortly after detection of the index case (**10.5% positivity**, 19/181).
 - **18/43 (42%)** cases were identified in the second round of testing conducted at the shelters approximately a week later (**15.3% positivity**, 18/118).
 - **2/43 (5%)** cases were detected through symptom screening at 14 symptom screening events at the shelters over 11 days.
 - **4/43 (9%)** cases were found when they sought health care outside of this series of investigations.
- **Resident cases:** Median age = 61 years (range 50-73); 31/35 (89%) were male (96% of the residents tested were men); 7 were hospitalized; no one died to date.
- **Staff cases:** Median age = 39 years (range 28-57); there were no hospitalizations and no deaths.
- Conditions that might have **facilitated the spread** of COVID-19 in these shelters included:
 - Movement of residents and use of multiple homeless services
 - Crowding and congregate sleeping arrangements
 - Challenges in keeping physical distance
 - Possible asymptomatic transmission
 - Unavailability of face coverings for residents for source control
- **Outbreak control measures** included moving some residents to other locations, limiting movement of residents into and out of the facility, limiting rotation of staff members, encouraging physical distancing including by placement of sleeping mats so heads are ≥ 2 metres apart, training staff in cleaning and disinfection, and providing disposable face masks for residents and staff.

Additional Information

- The three shelters were about 3 to 8 kilometres from each other and served persons ≥50 years.
- Surveillance activities at the three shelters included:
 - March 30-April 1: testing all available residents and staff.
 - April 7-8: testing all available residents and staff who tested negative or were unavailable at the first round of testing.
 - April 1-11: 14 symptom screening events for residents and staff.
- The authors noted that infected residents, older residents, and those with comorbidities should be prioritized to move to individual housing units during outbreaks.
- The effectiveness of the interventions could not be evaluated during the investigation and response.

PHO Reviewer's Comments

It is noteworthy that testing identified the vast majority of cases, while 14 symptom screening events only identified two cases. The second testing event yielded a higher percent positivity than the first. Those testing positive at the second test could have missed the first test, could have acquired their infection between the first and second test, or could have been in their early incubation period at the first test (before their infection could be detected by the test).

Citation

Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion (Public Health Ontario). Review of “COVID-19 outbreak among three affiliated homeless service sites — King County, Washington, 2020”. Toronto, ON: Queen's Printer for Ontario; 2020.

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