

# **COVID-19 Shelter Training for American Red Cross Partners**

**Overview: Preparing for, Operating and  
Closing a Shelter during COVID-19**

The information presented is current as of August 15, 2020.



# Audience & Purpose

## Audience – Red Cross Partners

- Local & State Government
  - Public Health
  - Emergency Management
  - Social Services Agencies
- Community Agencies & NGOs
- Faith-Based Organizations

## Prerequisites

- Previous shelter training or experience
- For those without shelter training or experience, 3 sheltering classes are recommended and are available to partners (see Resources section)

## Purpose

- To provide Red Cross partners with sheltering updates specific to COVID-19
- To provide an overview of Red Cross procedures on preparing for, operating and closing a shelter in a COVID-19 environment



# Context

*This presentation focuses on what is different in sheltering in a COVID-19 environment and builds on American Red Cross standard sheltering principles*

- The Red Cross mission to shelter people displaced by disaster remains the same under COVID-19 but adjustments to our procedures have been made
- Continue to prioritize the health, safety, and well-being of the workforce and shelter residents
- Adjustments follow Centers for Disease Control (CDC) guidance and best practices to protect shelter residents and workers from contracting and spreading COVID-19
- Non-congregate sheltering is the preferred sheltering method, but we must be prepared for a higher number of smaller congregate shelters



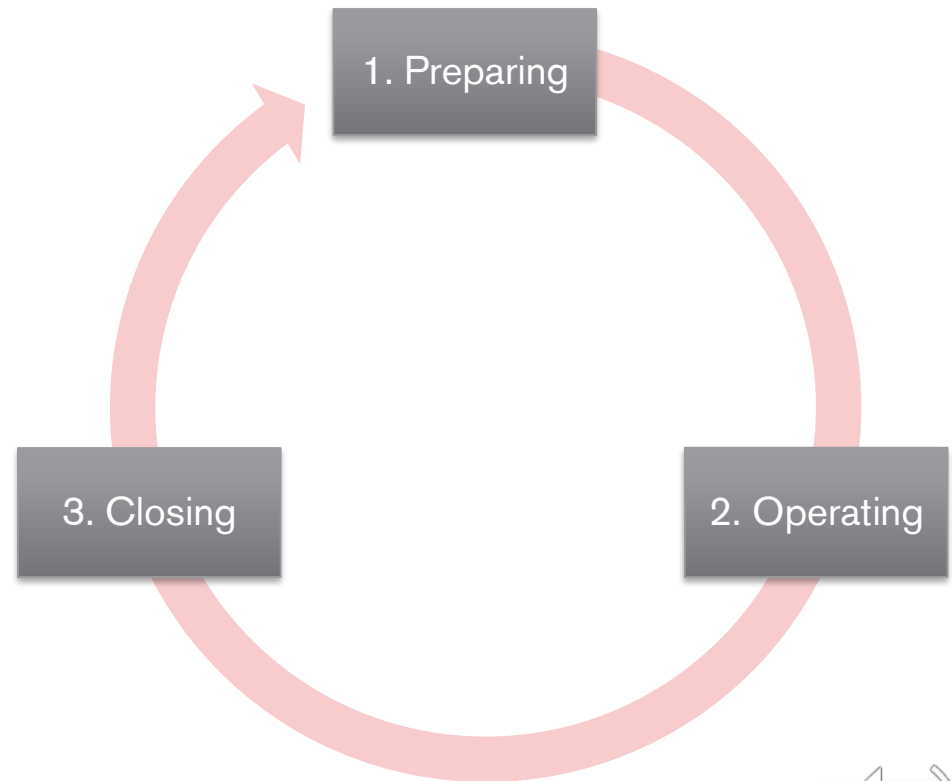
Resource: [Red Cross Compendium V.2.0](#): Workforce Safety pp. 17-19



# Agenda

## Sheltering during COVID-19

- **Preparing** – pre-disaster planning and readiness activities
- **Operating** – how to operate a shelter
- **Closing** – considerations for closing a shelter



## Key Messages

Keeping shelter residents and workforce safe in a shelter during COVID requires some adjustments to procedures

Recommendations follow Centers for Disease Control (CDC) guidance and best public health practices



# Types of Shelters

- **Evacuation Centers** – provide short-term, safe place for people fleeing to safety
  - Established before hurricane landfall, during wildfires, etc.
  - Fewer amenities and services than post-disaster shelters with dormitory services
  - Primarily provide shelter and food
    - May or may not provide cots and blankets



Photo by Kris Warner/American Red Cross



## Types of Shelters (cont.)

- **Non-Congregate Shelters** – provided to individuals and families as sheltering using hotels, motels, campsites, trailers, RVs, college dormitories, retreat camps, etc. Provides better separation of living space and privacy
- **Congregate Shelters** – provided to individuals and families for group sheltering using community facilities such as community centers, gymnasiums, etc. and includes shelters of all sizes. It is preferable to open a higher number of low-occupancy shelters to accommodate appropriate social distancing



# Examples of How American Red Cross May Support Your Shelters

- Recommendation: work with local Red Cross and other partners *pre-disaster* to discuss needs, expectations and resource allocation
- Any shelter Red Cross supports must embrace Red Cross principles about non-discrimination and disability integration
- Training
- Subject matter expertise
- Virtual support





# Assumptions about Sheltering in COVID-19

- Fear and anxiety in the community
- People may stay in their vehicles, RVs, or tents instead of coming into shelter
- Usual partners (public health, agencies assisting individuals experiencing homelessness) may already be engaged in COVID-19 activities and are not available
- Shelter residents may not adhere to social distancing protocols, isolation procedures or CDC guidance
- People experiencing pre-disaster homelessness and others with significant non-disaster related needs may come to shelters for help
- Possible short supply of PPE to meet CDC guidance

 Resource: [Pre-Landfall Congregate Shelter Operations in a COVID-19 Pandemic](#)



# Preferred Sheltering Option is Non-Congregate Sheltering

- Non-congregate sheltering should be used whenever possible because physical barrier features help reduce spread of infection
- Examples of non-congregate shelters: hotels, motels, campsites, trailers, RVs, college dormitories, retreat camps, etc.
- Screening may occur for all shelter residents coming to hotel per public health guidance



Resource: [Red Cross Compendium V.2.0](#): COVID-19 Non-Congregate Sheltering pp. 87-90



## Non-Congregate Sheltering (cont.)

- Use a reduced staffing footprint
  - If a job *can* be done virtually, it *should* be done virtually
- Arrange for individually packaged meals (IPMs) to reduce the amount of food handling
  - Use the *knock, set it down, step back* method to deliver meals to hotel rooms
- Check with emergency management on non-congregate shelter count reporting requirements
  - Non-congregate shelter counts are not recorded in National Shelter System (NSS)

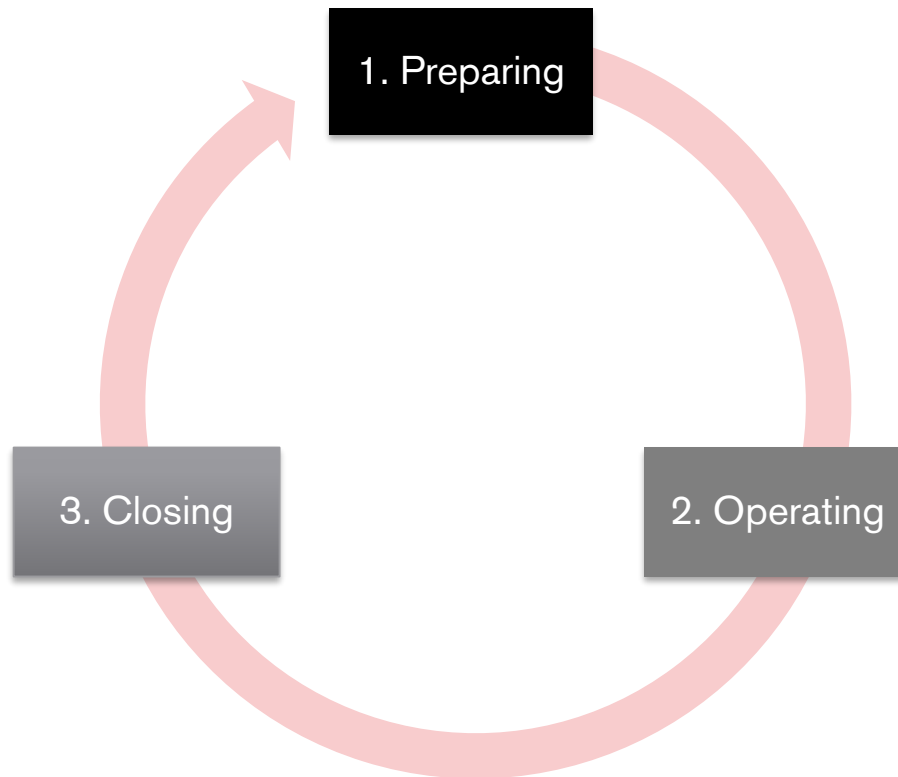


# Congregate Shelters: Strategies to minimize spread of COVID-19

Screening and access control with shelter entry barriers	Increased sanitation activities	Social distancing	Isolation care area	Smaller than normal staff	Smaller client capacity
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# Preparing for Congregate Shelter Operations




Resource: [Pre-Landfall Congregate Shelter Operations in a COVID-19 Pandemic](#)



# Preparing

- Identify appropriate shelter sites, prioritizing non-congregate sheltering locations
- Contact local public health to understand their capability and capacity to assist in the screening and isolation care area
- Confer with local public health and emergency management for current COVID-19 guidance before opening
- Decide whether and what type of shelter you would open and who would run the shelter
- Consult with partner agencies (homelessness resources, pets, feeding, donations management, COADS/VOADS as well as community agencies that assist those with disabilities, or other access and functional needs)

## [Red Cross Compendium V.2.0:](#)

 Resource: Critical Conversations Regarding COVID-19 Sheltering pp. 32-37,  
Workforce Safety pp. 17-19,  
Shelter Readiness Activities pp. 22-25



## Preparing (cont.)

- Provide training for your workforce
- Secure agreements with feeding vendors who can supply 3 individually packaged meals
- Make a list of COVID-19-specific supplies such as PPE, COVID-19 signage, blue tape to mark off 6 ft.
- Coordinate with pet partners. Co-location of pet shelter on shelter grounds is desirable. Pets should not be allowed in dormitory due to safety/health concerns
- Message that unsolicited donations are not being accepted due to safety/health concerns

[Red Cross Compendium V.2.0](#): Unsolicited Donations p. 72

Feeding Readiness Actions p. 25



Resources: Necessary Supplies pp. 28-31

Pets, Service and Assistance Animals in Congregate Shelters p. 92

[Feeding in COVID-19 Congregate Shelters](#)



# Staffing

- Workers must pass all screenings
- Have a team of trained people ready to be assigned to a shelter. Expect fewer workers to be available
- Any job that can be done virtually, should be done virtually
- Comfortable decision-maker, problem solver and handling ambiguity
- 6-10 in-person workers needed to effectively manage a small shelter for a 24-hour period
- Minimum of 2 in-person workers per shift at every congregate shelter
- Recruit shelter residents as shelter workers to supplement smaller staff



Resource: [Red Cross Compendium V.2.0](#): Staffing Footprint pp. 60-62





# Supplies

The following supplies augment standard material resources to ensure safety to shelter residents and workers

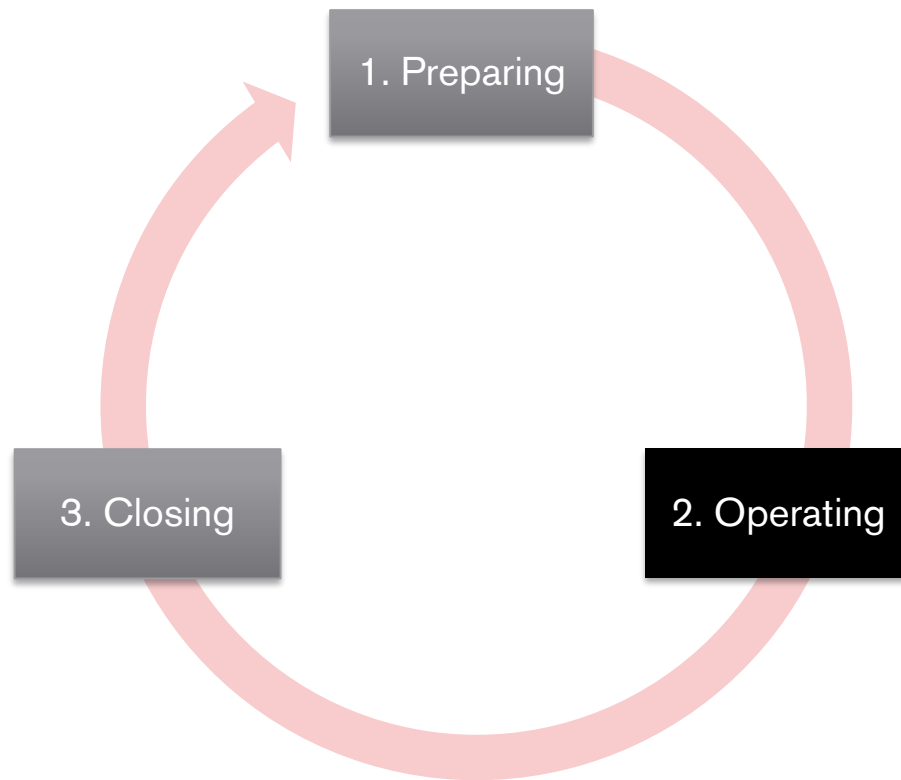
Protection	Screening	Isolation Care	Cleaning
N95 masks Face masks	Thermometers	Gowns Goggles or Face Shields Gloves	Hand sanitizers Hand soaps Cleaning wipes (like Clorox wipes)



Resource: [Red Cross Compendium V.2.0: COVID-19 Supplies and Kits](#): pp. 28-31



# Operating a Congregate Shelter during COVID-19



# Shelter Setup Considerations

- Ensure opening facility inspection is performed prior to setting up so pre-existing damage can be documented
- Set up screening area in front of the entrance for all people entering the shelter
- Provide for an Isolation Care Area
- Set up registration area just inside shelter entrance
- Arrange for extra handwashing stations in isolation, feeding, and dormitory areas



## Shelter Setup Considerations (cont.)

- Separate feeding area from dormitory
- Set up facility for one-way traffic
  - Make one-way arrows on floor with blue tape
  - Create one-way entrances for meals and deliveries
- Consider space for shelter residents to store their belongings
- Arrange for co-located pet sheltering on shelter grounds but outside the dormitory



# Safety Considerations: Social Distancing and Hand Hygiene

- Ensure protocols for entry into the shelter are maintained
- Maintain physical distancing of 6 ft. at all times, even from fellow shelter workers
- Wash hands frequently and provide hand sanitizer throughout shelter site. Obtain additional handwashing stations
- Follow recommended local public health or CDC protocols on hand washing, wearing face coverings, and donning/doffing PPE
- Increase frequency and degree of cleaning and sanitizing
- Provide extra trash receptacles and increase frequency of trash removal
- Post signage to remind everyone to follow safety protocols



# Screening & Shelter Flow

## Tornado/Flood/Fire

Event caused need for emergency sheltering

Plan for less than 14 days

Align with Public Health guidance



Screening Process  
Temperature and Questions  
Public Health Screeners

Symptomatic

Symptomatic

No symptoms

Isolation Care Area  
Residents who Develop Symptoms, Suspected or are Confirmed COVID +

Barrier/Door

One Way Drop Off of Supplies



Shelter cannot be opened until isolation care area is resourced and operational

Pets Animal Services

Shelter Size = 50 clients maximum  
110 sq ft per client  
Cots 6-ft apart (families stay together)

Everyone leaving shelter site is rescreened upon return

Shelter Workers  
6-10 in-person workers  
Shelterees may be part of workforce

Pets are not allowed in dormitory

Barrier/Door  
Shelter Registration



# Screening Area

- Screen everyone, including visitors and staff, prior to entering shelter
- Control shelter entrance and exit 24/7 to ensure everyone gets screened
- Assign trained screeners
  - Licensing not required

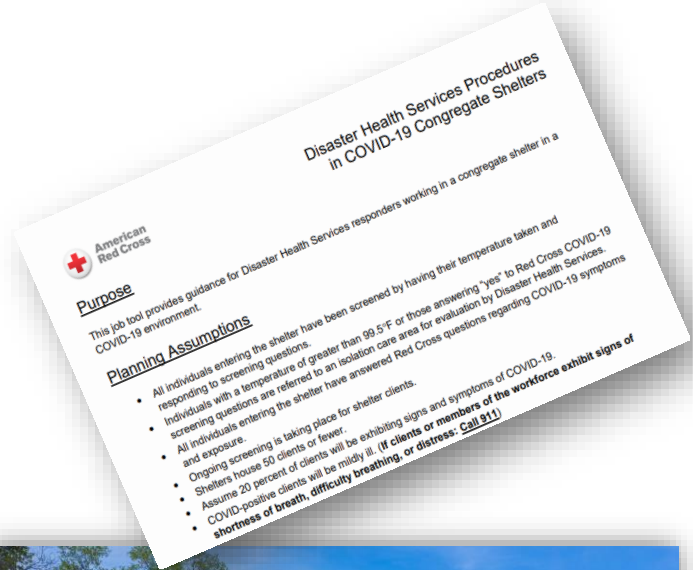



Photo credit: Steve Montalto High Mountain Images, Photography and Graphic Design

 Resource: [Red Cross Compendium V.2.0: COVID-19 Shelter Health Screening Area pp. 93-94](#)



# Set Up Isolation Care Area

- Connect with local public health to assist in the screening and isolation care area
- Isolation Care Area must be set up before shelter can be opened
- Only licensed health care professionals may enter Isolation Care Area. No other staff may enter

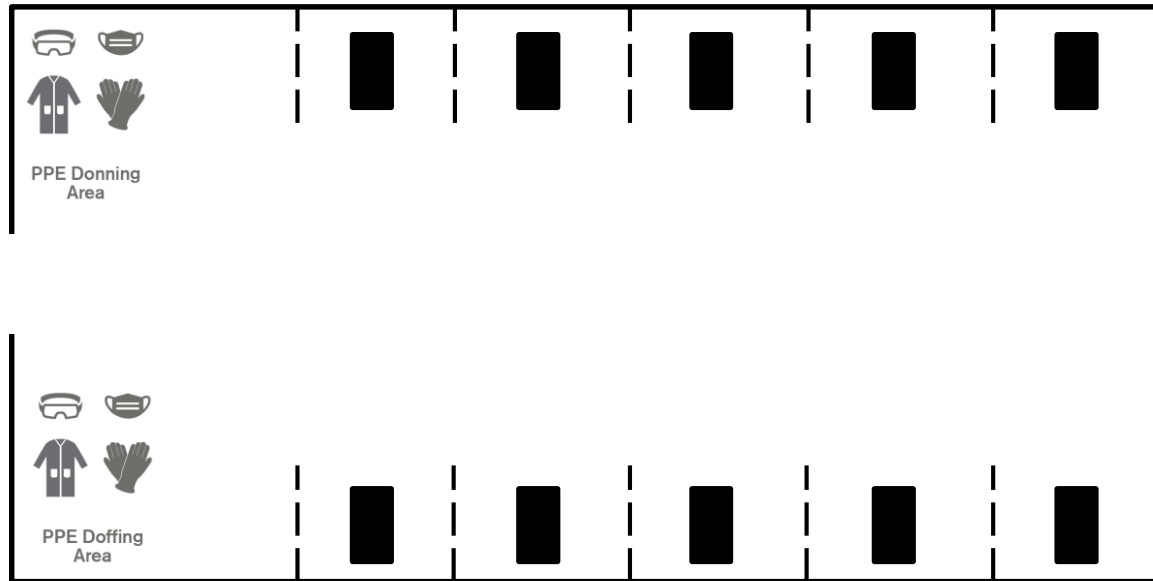


Resource: [Disaster Health Services Procedures in COVID-19 Congregate Shelters](#)





# Set Up Isolation Care Area



# Reception/Registration Area

- Create area with social distancing for those waiting to register
- Assure shelter residents can share their personal information with registration workers in privacy
- Provide visual cues for social distancing: blue tape, cones
- Consider using barriers such as privacy screens to maintain client confidentiality
- Locate registration immediately inside shelter entrance
- Allow shelter access to those seeking only support services or info



## Reception/Registration Area (cont.)

- Collect registration information for shelter residents. Staff needs to be able to locate shelter residents and make sure all are accounted for if there is an emergency
- Provide residents with shelter rules, feeding times, and other info
- Ensure all residents check in and out at registration each time they enter or leave the shelter
- Be careful with shared items. Pens should be disinfected between uses. Use “clean” and “used” containers



## Reception/Registration Area (cont.)

- Ask if residents need help with medical resources (lost glasses, medical equipment, prescriptions). Refer to a licensed health professional for assistance
- Count shelter residents at the same time every day. Usually around midnight, this count is reported to Emergency Management
- Provide disaster info updates regularly and in all necessary languages



# Signage

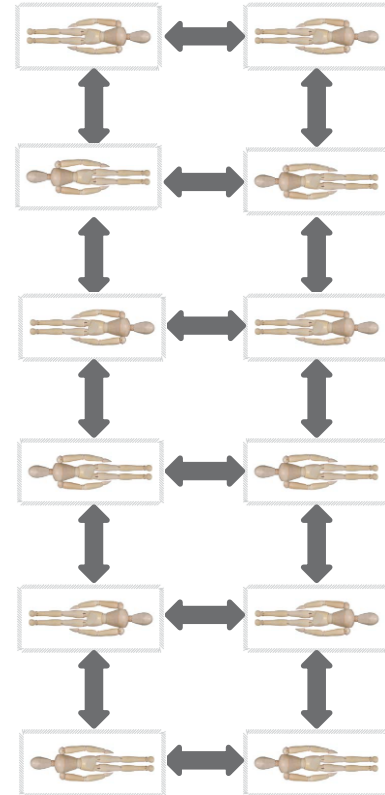
- Shelters require additional signage to direct and inform shelter residents about COVID-19 environment
  - social distancing
  - face coverings
  - no pets
  - no unsolicited donations
- Post signs in necessary languages
- Examples of COVID-19 signage can be found here:

[CDC Print Resources-COVID 19](#)



# Dormitory Layout

- Alternate layout of cots head-to-toe
- Limit to one entry and one exit: other doors for emergency exit only
- Mark floor with blue tape to indicate one-way flow of traffic throughout dormitory
- Provide hand washing station or sanitizer at entrance to dormitory
- Place signage about face masks, hand hygiene, meal times, lights out, info



## Cots – 6 Feet of Separation

- Allow 6 ft. of separation between cots on all sides
- 110 sq. ft. per person provides appropriate space for social distancing and for those with various needs requiring additional space accommodations

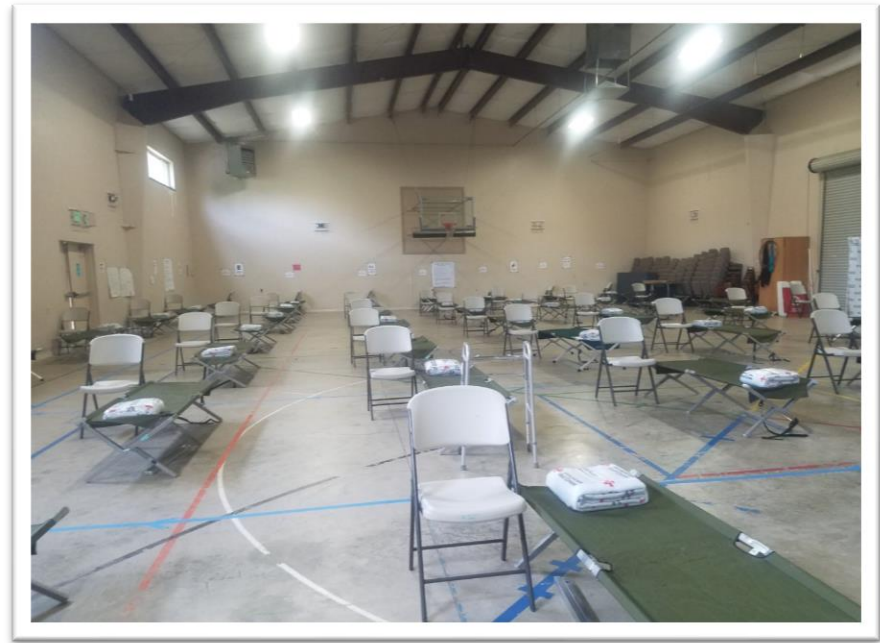


Photo credit: Steve Montalto High Mountain Images, Photography and Graphic Design



# Feeding

- Set up the feeding area separate from the dormitory area
- Add handwashing stations or hand sanitizer near feeding line
- Space tables to maintain 6-ft. distance between them
- Incorporate barriers (clear plastic, plexiglass, etc.) between workers and clients
- Provide masks, gloves, hats, hairnets, and beard nets to feeding workers
- Consider staggering feeding times to reduce congregating



## Feeding (cont.)

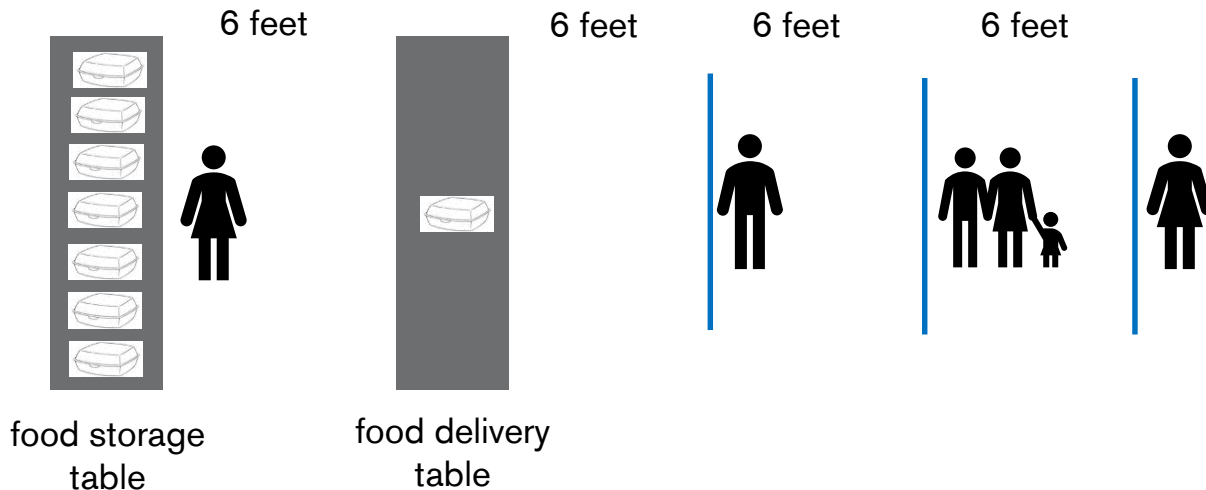
- Provide Individually Packaged Meals
- Utilize local vendors to provide specialized meals to clients who require them based on dietary, cultural, or religious requirements
- Follow safe food handling guidelines
- Use the “set it down and step back” method when delivering face coverings, food or supplies
- Clean all surfaces with sanitizing spray, wipes or bleach solution every 2 hours during feeding times. Also before and after every meal



Resource: [Red Cross Compendium V.2.0](#): Feeding pp. 73-77



# Maintain Social Distancing & Food Safety When Feeding



## Use the Set it Down and Step Back Method

1. Wear serving gloves and mask
2. Keep clients at 6' distance
3. Ask which meal they need (standard, vegetarian, gluten free, etc.)
4. Take meal box from storage table and place on delivery table
5. Step back



# Inclusivity & Accessibility Considerations

- All shelter residents must be able to maintain their independence and move about in the least restrictive setting possible
- Be committed to serving the needs of people of all races, ethnicities, cultures, religions and backgrounds, including those with disabilities and others with access and functional needs
- Ensure all information and services are accessible to everyone in the shelter
- Provide "communication stations" with video relay services for the deaf and hard of hearing; easy access to restrooms; cot placement near outlets for medical equipment; signage in multiple languages, etc.



# Inclusivity & Accessibility Considerations (cont.)

- To reduce the spread of illness, avoid creating children's play areas
- Consider independent single-person activities such as movies, books, puzzles, coloring, etc. and be ready with items for all age ranges. These items should not be shared
- Service animals are always welcome



# Interacting with Shelter Residents

*Interacting with shelter residents provides an opportunity for you to listen for potential roadblocks to their recovery.*

*It also shows you care*

Questions to start a conversation with a resident:

- Is there anything I can help you with right now?
- How is your day going?
- Are you able to keep in touch with friends and family?
- Are you getting enough to eat and drink?



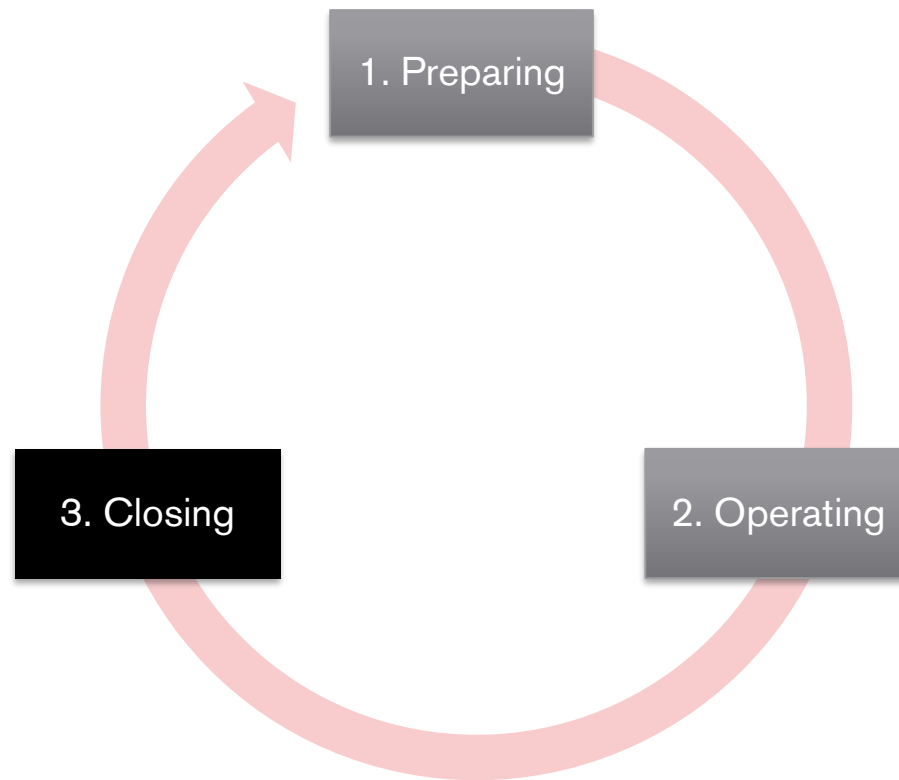
# Assisting Residents with Transition to Sustainable Housing

*Focus efforts on identifying and overcoming barriers that prevent shelter residents from transitioning to sustainable housing*

- Socialize daily with every resident and listen for unmet needs and obstacles to recovery. Show compassion
- Share updates with residents
- Engage community partners such as social service organizations, faith-based groups and other partners to help shelter residents move forward



# Closing the Shelter



# Closing the Shelter

- Ensure every resident has a plan to go somewhere safe before the shelter closes. Engage community partners
- Provide at least 48 hours' notice of closure verbally and in writing. Make sure residents know when last meal will be served
- Notify key stakeholders of plan to close shelter. Emergency management, local public health agency, public affairs, community partners, feeding vendors, shelter staff, etc.
- Work with residents who may need transportation to their next destination
- Arrange for thorough cleaning of facility and reusable materials, consider using a commercial cleaning company
- Perform a closing inspection of the facility





# Key Takeaways

- Prioritize safety of shelter workers and shelter residents
- Conduct congregate shelter operations in partnership with local health officials and emergency management
- Follow public health guidelines for social distancing, face coverings, handwashing and sanitizing
- Screening area and isolation care area are new required sections of a congregate shelter
- Increase square footage per shelter resident to 110 sq. ft.
- Use physical barriers such as cones, caution tape, blue tape on floors, and privacy screens to help support distancing measures



# Summary of Recommended COVID-19 Sheltering Changes

Task	Procedures Specific to COVID-19
Facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• About 3 times more congregate shelter space needed for dormitory</li> <li>• Set up facility for one-way traffic. Make arrows on floor with blue tape</li> </ul>
Staffing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limit staff footprint. Any job that can be done virtually, should be done virtually</li> <li>• 6-10 shelter workers for 24-hr. period (small shelter)</li> <li>• Min. 2 in-person shelter workers at all times for congregate shelters</li> <li>• Recruit shelter residents as shelter workers</li> </ul>
Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer residents and workers wellness items such as masks, thermometer, gloves, hand sanitizer, paper bag, etc.</li> <li>• Increased number of handwashing stations and hand sanitizer</li> <li>• Everyone in shelter wears masks and social distances</li> <li>• Activities/Entertainment should be single-person use and not passed around to others</li> </ul>



# Summary of Recommended COVID-19 Sheltering Changes (cont.)

Task	Procedures Specific to COVID-19
Screening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Set up screening in front of entrance to shelter for everyone entering shelter</li><li>• Check temperature and symptoms</li></ul>
Isolation Care Area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Set up before shelter opens</li><li>• Only licensed health professionals can enter isolation care area</li></ul>
Registration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Shelter residents get screened prior to registration</li><li>• 6 ft. of social distancing</li><li>• Maintain privacy</li><li>• Put pens in “clean” and “used” containers</li></ul>
Cots	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 110 sq. ft. per cot</li><li>• Space cots 6 ft. apart on all sides</li><li>• Arrange cots alternating head to toe</li></ul>

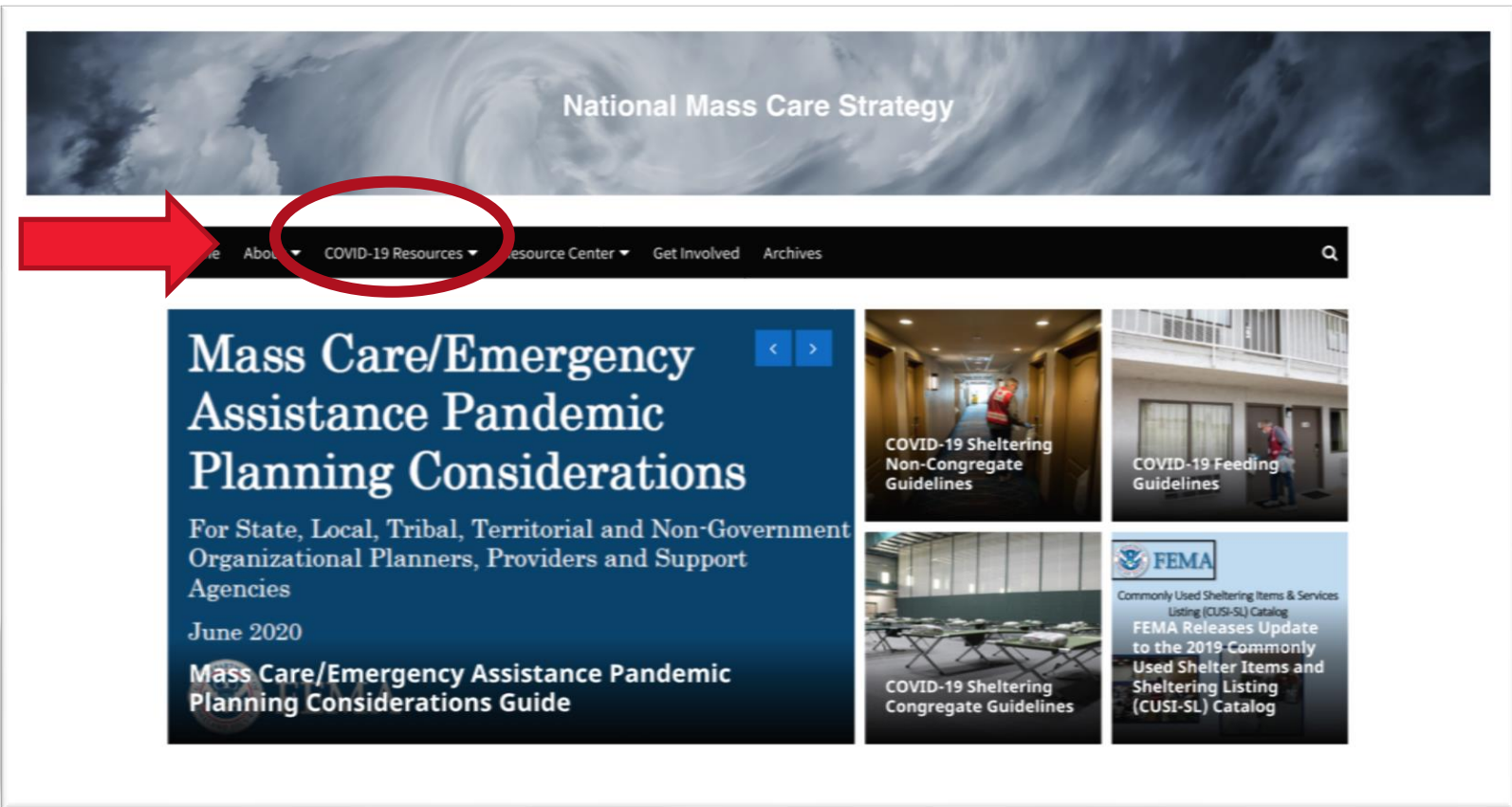


## Summary of Recommended COVID-19 Sheltering Changes (cont.)

Task	Procedures Specific to COVID-19
Feeding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Individually Packaged Meals</li><li>• Serving strategy: Set down. Step back</li><li>• Clean surfaces every 2 hours and before/after every meal</li></ul>
Cleaning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Increased cleaning especially high traffic areas</li><li>• More frequent trash removal</li></ul>
Pets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Set up co-located pet shelter. Pets should not be allowed in dormitory due to safety/health concerns</li></ul>
Unsolicited Donations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Unsolicited donations should not be accepted due to safety/health concerns</li></ul>



# COVID-19 Sheltering Guidance is Publicly Available to Partners



The screenshot shows the website header with the title "National Mass Care Strategy". Below the title is a navigation bar with several menu items: "Home", "About", "COVID-19 Resources", "Resource Center", "Get Involved", and "Archives". A red arrow points to the "COVID-19 Resources" menu item, which is circled in red. Below the navigation bar, there is a large blue banner for "Mass Care/Emergency Assistance Pandemic Planning Considerations" with subtext "For State, Local, Tribal, Territorial and Non-Government Organizational Planners, Providers and Support Agencies" and "June 2020". To the right of the banner are four smaller tiles: "COVID-19 Sheltering Non-Congregate Guidelines", "COVID-19 Feeding Guidelines", "COVID-19 Sheltering Congregate Guidelines", and "FEMA Commonly Used Sheltering Items & Services Listing (CUSH-SL) Catalog FEMA Releases Update to the 2019 Commonly Used Shelter Items and Sheltering Listing (CUSH-SL) Catalog".

Resource: [www.nationalmasscarestrategy.org](http://www.nationalmasscarestrategy.org)



## Resources – Compendium, Field Guide, Signage

- [National Mass Care Strategy website](#)
- [Red Cross DCS COVID-19 Compendium](#)
- [FEMA Mass Care/Emergency Assistance Pandemic Planning Considerations](#)
- [FEMA Shelter Field Guide](#)
- [CDC: COVID-19 Print Resources](#)
- [CDC: How to Protect Yourself and Others](#)
- [SAMHSA: Taking Care of Your Behavioral Health](#)



## Resources – Compendium, Field Guide, Signage

- [Disaster Health Services Procedures in COVID-19 Congregate Shelters](#)
- [Pre-Landfall Congregate Shelter Operations in a COVID-19 Pandemic](#)
- [Feeding in COVID-19 Congregate Shelters](#)
- [Summary of Recommended COVID-19 Sheltering Changes](#)



## Resources – Training for *New Shelter Workers*

For partners who do not have any shelter training or experience, we recommend 3 Red Cross classes available on YouTube:

1. Shelter Fundamentals v2 and Shelter Fundamentals Forms Training – 57 min.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jwgBgG4s6Mo&feature=youtu.be>

2. Sheltering in a COVID-19 Environment – 21 min.

<https://youtube.com/watch?v=pKpvlBbbYQc>

3. COVID-19 Shelter Assignments – 14 min.

<https://youtube.com/watch?v=lz3mLhj5HP4>







Got questions or suggestions?  
Contact American Red Cross  
[MassCare@redcross.org](mailto:MassCare@redcross.org)

