



## Allegheny County Department of Human Services Helpful Resources

### FAQ for the Safe Haven

#### **What is the Safe Haven?**

In response to the declared public health emergency resulting from the spread of COVID-19, the Safe Haven is a voluntary, temporary isolation and quarantine facility for individuals who cannot safely shelter in place. While most people will isolate and recover in their own homes, the Safe Haven is for individuals who do not have a home or who live in a congregate care residential facility that does not have the physical space to provide isolation or quarantine. The County's priority for the Safe Haven is to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and ensure the most vulnerable people in Allegheny County have a safe place to isolate or quarantine. Individuals staying at the facility may be highly vulnerable to negative outcomes if exposed to COVID-19, may be positive or presumed positive for COVID-19, or may have been exposed to an individual with COVID-19 and in need of quarantine.

#### **What is the difference between isolation and quarantine?**

Isolation is for someone who is showing symptoms and/or tested positive for COVID-19. It keeps infected people away from healthy people to prevent sickness from spreading further. Self-isolation is advisable for individuals who would be at high risk for complications if they were to develop COVID-19 based upon their health status, age, and/or chronic health conditions.

Quarantine is for someone who does not show or feel symptoms currently, but who was known to be exposed to someone with COVID-19. People in quarantine are kept apart from others to reduce the risk of potentially infecting others until it is determined that they are not sick.

Again, the Safe Haven is intended for individuals who do not have a safe place to isolate or quarantine (i.e. people who do not have a home or who live in congregate care facilities that may not have the physical space to provide it).

#### **Where is it?**

The Safe Haven is located 5 miles from downtown Pittsburgh. The exact location is not being publicly released to protect the privacy of those staying there.

## **Who is staying there? What are the eligibility criteria?**

The Safe Haven is serving several different populations; referrals are now accepted from homelessness shelters, street outreach providers, refugee and immigrant services, and other systems across DHS (i.e. Office of Behavioral Health, Justice-involved individuals, etc.), the Allegheny County Health Department, and approved essential services providers to include serving emergency medical providers. The site is for adults only; DHS is working to secure another space for families. DHS has established a separate safe haven space for CYF-involved youth.

The Safe Haven is only intended to serve people who have no other safe options to self-isolate. Due to capacity constraints, we ask that providers exhaust all other possibilities before a referral is made. In order to be eligible to stay at the Safe Haven, referrals **must be at least one** of the following:

- High risk (over age 60, have respiratory issues, heart problems, other chronic health conditions known to increase the risk of negative outcomes associated with COVID-19);  
OR
- Are showing potential symptoms of COVID-19; OR
- Have tested positive for COVID-19; OR
- Have known exposure to an individual who has tested positive; **AND**
- Do not have a safe option where they can isolate or quarantine.

## **What planning went into it?**

With the situation around COVID-19 rapidly evolving, DHS had to work quickly to create a safe place for the most vulnerable to self-isolate. While swift in its response, DHS was intentional in its decision-making and implementation to ensure the safety and well-being of those served at the Safe Haven site.

DHS did due diligence to incorporate research and best practices on quarantine and isolation spaces. DHS followed guidance from the CDC and the Allegheny County Health Department. In addition, regional health care partners, other jurisdictions that already opened quarantine hotels, and behavioral health and medical professionals were engaged to assist with program design and service delivery. As the situation continues to evolve and the county and the nation learns more, DHS continues to consult these experts on a regular basis.

## **Who can refer people there?**

Primarily County contracted providers and partners as well as approved essential service providers. DHS has identified a central contact in each of its program offices and suggests providers reach out to their individual program office with questions about the referral process. We are expanding the referral process out to essential service providers in stages, with an anticipated roll out to include our regional health care partners coming soon.

### **Is there a process for self-referral?**

Not at this time. If you think you have symptoms of COVID-19, please reach out to your medical provider to discuss your health concerns and symptoms, or you may contact the Allegheny County Health Department COVID-19 Hotline at 888-856-2774.

### **How do you prioritize people and choose who is accepted and denied?**

The referral form assesses individuals' symptoms, potential/known exposure, testing status, and risk factors for complications if an individual were to develop COVID-19 based upon their age, known health history, and chronic health conditions. DHS completes any necessary follow up for additional information to ensure an informed decision. There is a daily case conferencing call with DHS program offices, Community Human Services (CHS is the Operator of the Safe Haven), behavioral health experts, the Health Department, and the clinical expertise of medical professionals to make determinations. Based on guidance from the Health Department and Public Health experts, we are triaging and prioritizing individuals who have tested positive and do not have a place to go. Referrals are accepted based upon capacity and prioritization, and only denied if they do not meet eligibility criteria (see above for criteria) or if the Safe Haven would be unable to fully meet their service needs.

### **Why are you serving both highly vulnerable and COVID + patients in the same building?**

Ideally, DHS would have two separate facilities for those who are highly vulnerable and those who are presumed or confirmed positive for COVID-19. We performed a robust and rigorous search of potential spaces, including hotels, college dorms, and apartment complexes across Allegheny County. While several became possibilities, for one reason or another (most notably insurance issues), only one came to fruition. This was after reaching out to 70 hotels in the area, 23 of which were interested in speaking about the opportunity, and 3 of which elected to move to contract – only 1 hotel made it out of the contract process.

DHS worked closely with the Health Department to understand whether and how we could safely house vulnerable individuals with those who are presumed or confirmed positive in one facility. Since it is a hotel, people are able to self-isolate in their own room with their own bathroom and have food and other necessities delivered to their door. We are expanding capacity within the site continually to support enhanced isolation and separation between the individuals who have varying statuses within the Safe Haven, with placements on separate floors where dedicated entrances and staffing and will safeguard against interaction. The Health Department confirmed this could be safely done with the right precautions in place. With their guidance, we took several measures to ensure the safety of guests. These are outlined in detail below.

## **What are the safety precautions being taken at the Safe Haven?**

The safety precautions put in place at the Safe Haven are based on guidance from the Allegheny County Health Department, CDC, specialists trained in emergency and disaster response, public health officials and medical professionals. We have also established a Medical Advisory Committee, made up of individuals from street medicine, disaster medicine, two of the largest health care systems in Western Pennsylvania, and medical experts experienced with this population. This advisory committee ensures we are in line with all necessary health stipulations and best practices.

The following safety precautions are in place:

- Transportation is arranged for guests.
  - Individuals in need of quarantine (with known exposure to someone with COVID-19) are transported by a private vehicle (one person per vehicle). Both the driver and passenger wear masks and gloves.
  - Individuals in need of self-isolation (who are high risk due to health status) are transported by a private vehicle (one person per vehicle). Both the driver and passenger wear masks and gloves.
  - Individuals in need of isolation (who are symptomatic or confirmed positive) are transported in an ambulance (with EMS standard infection control) to the site.
- We highly monitor who is in the building. There are guards 24/7 stationed at each entrance point that guests and staff access. No unapproved visitors are allowed on site, although people can arrange to drop items off for guests. Items will be left with Safe Haven staff and delivered to the guest directly. Visitors are not allowed to hand items directly to guests to avoid possible exposure.
- There are enhanced cleaning and sanitizing protocols throughout the day, with increased frequency of sanitization at all areas that are potential touch points where people are able to move within the site, such as door handles. When a guest exits the hotel, all rooms are cleaned using a multiday protocol according to CDC guidelines to include a waiting period of at least 24 hours before the room is cleaned. It is then first sanitized, with cleaning and turn over services to include new linens being installed in stages to ensure that it is safe for the next guest.
- All guests sign a program agreement that outlines the importance of isolation and quarantine, expectations of guests, rules, and regulations to comply by during their stay.
- Guests are kept separate at all times based on their status (highly vulnerable, symptomatic or confirmed positive for COVID-19, or known to be exposed to someone with COVID-19).
  - There is a separate entrance for people who are symptomatic or confirmed positive
  - Guests are assigned to different floors and wings based on their status
  - There are guards on the isolation and quarantine floors to ensure only authorized individuals enter
  - CHS has designated specific paths (doors, stairs, elevators) in the hotel for individuals based on the floor to which they are assigned to limit any cross-paths.

- Masks are required within the building at all times by staff and residents.
- There are 2 nurses on site at all times and 1 physician from the Medical Reserve Corps during the day.
- Guests are expected to completely isolate within their rooms with brief, scheduled breaks for smoking and/or fresh air outside.
  - Each guest has their own room and bathroom
  - Meals and other necessities are delivered directly to their door, along with trash and laundry service. Services are provided without interpersonal contact between guest and staff.
  - Telehealth is being made available for appointments and there is a phone in each room for case management and any other communication needs.
- If guests leave their room, there are separate outside areas based on their status
- We are prioritizing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for staff on site
  - Staff have gowns, goggles, face masks (N95 respirators), gloves, and hand sanitizer
  - There are designated, separated donning and doffing rooms where staff put on or take off their PPE to separate out those materials that are contaminated

### **Who is staffing it?**

The Safe Haven is staffed and managed by Community Human Services (CHS).

### **Is there food?**

Yes. Guests are provided 3 meals a day delivered to their door by CHS. There is a cold breakfast and lunch, and hot dinner. There are also mini refrigerators in each room if guests bring food with them. Meals are prepared by Community Kitchen Pittsburgh.

### **Is there Internet/TV?**

Yes. There is cable TV in every room and access to Wi-Fi for internet. Guests are loaned a tablet at check in which enables them to access the internet and telehealth services.

### **Is there security?**

Yes, there is 24/7 security, including guards at the exits and on the isolation floors to monitor who is entering and exiting.

### **How long do people stay?**

It depends, but generally (per CDC guidance):

- Individuals in isolation (known or presumed to be COVID-19 positive) are expected to stay 72 hours after they stop showing symptoms, without medication to regulate temperature.
- Individuals in quarantine (based on potential exposure to someone with COVID-19) are expected to stay 14 days based on the time it takes to develop illness if infected.

Once an individual has met one of the above criteria, they will be expected to leave the site. Transportation and next steps will be coordinated for individuals leaving the facility. The Safe Haven is a voluntary and unlocked facility. If an individual finds an alternate, safe place to stay (i.e. secures their own housing, stays with family, a friend, or another support), or determines that they would like to leave the Safe Haven without housing in place, they may exit at any time.

### **Are guests allowed out of their rooms?**

While we expect people to stay in their rooms as much as possible, people can go outside for fresh air and exercise. There is a private courtyard available to the highly vulnerable individuals who are nonsmokers, accessible only from the first lobby floor, as well as green space and areas where guests can walk around the property for exercise. DHS has established procedures so that this is highly monitored and regulated to keep everyone safe, including designated outdoor areas for vulnerable and symptomatic/confirmed positive persons, to keep them separated.

### **Where can people smoke?**

Cigarette smoking is not permitted inside the Safe Haven. Smoke breaks can be arranged in advance in coordination with CHS to help ensure that social distancing is maintained. Guests will need to plan accordingly, and smokers should bring a supply of cigarettes with them to the site, as there is not a store nearby.

### **Can people travel to and from the Safe Haven?**

In most cases the answer is no, as we need to preserve the health and wellbeing of everyone staying at the Safe Haven. Going off site into the community potentially jeopardizes quarantine and isolation. If a guest has a health care appointment or other urgent need off-site, they should let their supports and CHS know as soon as possible to determine if it can be accommodated. There will be medical staff on site, and support will be available to plan for continuity of care and meeting clients' health needs. There are also phones in each room, along with telehealth options.

### **Can people bring pets?**

No, however, approved service animals will be accepted. Additionally, DHS will work with individuals to figure out potential alternative care options for their pet while they are staying at the Safe Haven.

### **Are people exiting Allegheny County Jail able to stay at the Safe Haven?**

Only those who meet our eligibility criteria can stay at the Safe Haven. Justice-involved individuals who have been released from Allegheny County Jail and do not have a safe place to stay may be referred. As with all referrals, we work to ensure the right community supports are in place and coordinate with the courts if an individual is under supervision.

**If you have more capacity, why aren't you taking people faster?**

Intakes are purposefully staggered based on guidance from Public Health experts and medical professionals, who are advising the site and its capacity.

**Who is paying for it?**

There is financial support from the foundation community. In addition, DHS funds are being utilized and we are anticipating some costs will be reimbursable from the state and federal governments.