

PAWTUCKET HOUSING AUTHORITY

CORONAVIRUS RESPONSE PLAN UPDATE

October 22, 2020 - Version #7

I. Introduction:

The Pawtucket Housing Authority is monitoring the current viral outbreak formally known as the novel Coronavirus or COVID 19. This is a constantly changing situation. We are taking this very seriously and have developed a Response Plan should this health crisis impact our delivery of services to our residents and participants of our housing programs. There are many sources of factual information concerning the virus that can be found at these websites:

- The Center for Disease Control: www.cdc.gov
- RI Department of Health COVID-19: <https://health.ri.gov/diseases/ncov2019/>
- The World Health Organization: www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus
- The National Institutes of Health: www.nih.gov/health-information/coronavirus
- **Call United Way of Rhode Island 2-1-1.**

For the more than 6 months (then we will re-assess): PHA continues to be cautious and react in a manner we feel is justified to protect ourselves and our families. We are taking prudent measures to protect ourselves, our residents and those we work with every day. This plan provides guidance as to how PHA can continue our work while being cautious and respectful of this serious health issue facing our community. Our goal will be to limit our employee and resident exposure to the virus and to prevent the further spread of the virus.

II. Communication:

The best efforts to combat a serious health issue like COVID19 is to communicate clearly and effectively with employees, residents, government officials, vendors and the public. Accurate and timely communication will be critical in order to provide a proactive response rather than reactive. Use of multiple forms of communication will be important to spread the message as widely as possible to those who will rely on us now and in the future. This will include letters, emails, the PHA website, flyers, meetings and when possible, text messaging.

Employees:

When it is necessary to communicate with staff the preferred method will NOT be to call for a mandatory staff meeting to go over information. If the situation calls for immediate notification, use of texting and emails will be used to get information to employees quickly. In the event there are changes in policies and procedures or there are work stoppages, this information shall be done in writing to remove any confusion or to limit misinterpretations.

Areas that are being addressed:

- Controlled access to PHA offices;
- Protocols for completing work orders in resident's homes;
- Responding to emergency calls;
- Inspections (including REAC);
- New lease ups;
- Use of outside vendors;

- In Person Work Attendance
- In Person meetings with residents for resident services and recertifications will be suspended
- Staff with school age children (under 12 years of age) – without childcare or afterschool care

Residents/Participants:

The PHA currently serves over 2,000 households and therefore communication with them may be limited to letters, use of the website, social media, and those participating in our email messaging service. It will be important to provide our residents with helpful information that is reliable and effective. Written communication will include basic information about the virus, how to protect themselves, prevent the viruses spread and where they can find more information. They will be encouraged to contact health officials if they believe they have contracted the virus or are showing signs of the symptoms. Residents will be asked to self-quarantine themselves to protect their neighbors and others for as long as may be required due to governmental action. If you ask them to remove themselves from common areas or PHA offices, they must comply. PHA staff are instructed to call PPD if a resident fails to remove themselves from the office when requested to do so by PHA staff. We must ask all of our residents and participants to continue to live their lives in a manner as normal as possible and to stay alert as the conditions change. We must all be prepared to respond in an appropriate manner and not panic or act in a frenzied manner that will not protect ourselves or others. **All residents, staff and visitors must wear masks at all times in our common areas and all must social distance at least 6 ft. in distance.**

Congregate services are discouraged at this time and at some point, it may be impossible to provide services on site if we can't do so with minimum congregation of residents. When schools are closed, we may work with school departments to assist in food delivery as we are able. In the event that services are disrupted, we will work with state and local officials to make every effort to provide meals and services. All residents are encouraged to take appropriate measures to have sufficient food and supplies on hand in the event that a quarantine is instituted. All meals and other provided services to residents must be left at the apartment door (use of plastic bags) and no direct interaction with residents during this time. All wellness checks will be handled directly by the property manager, resident services manager and director of security. Use of phone calls and city public safety staff to address residents that may have COVID symptoms or test positive.

Vendors:

For our partners who work with us to provide goods and services, we will keep them informed via emails and/or phone calls in any changes to our work environment. If buildings or neighborhoods are quarantined, we will make them aware of the situation so that they may determine if they can or will provide services if needed. Emergency work items requiring immediate attention in an area of concern will be disclosed and a plan to deal with the emergency will be developed in a timely fashion subject to the nature of the emergency. **For emergencies dealing with fire or police services, residents shall continue to use 911 services.**

Deliveries should be limited to lobby or entry space, or immediately placed in storage if possible, packages may be disinfected or allowed to sit more than 24 hours before processing. No vendor should be allowed office access unless their service requires it, invoices can be dropped off in a lock box or with the package. All deliveries from Amazon are being handled with our security division for Kennedy Manor during COVID-19, as Amazon is in a trial period for change of deliveries to high rise developments.

Government Officials:

The PHA will work closely with state and local officials to monitor the situation and report any known instances of the virus that have affected our staff or residents. We will cooperate fully with any request for information as health officials determine the status of the virus in our communities. If and when government decrees are issued, we will work to communicate these directives to our residents and staff. The Executive Director or his/her designee of the PHA shall be the point of contact for all communication with public officials.

Incident Response:

In the event an employee or resident has contracted the virus, senior management shall immediately convene to develop a response. If contact with public health officials has not yet occurred, such contact will be made immediately by the Executive Director. We will coordinate our response with them and ensure that our efforts do not duplicate or in any way impede in their ability to respond to the incident. Senior management, working with public officials, will help to determine the source of the virus, take steps to ensure that the spread of the virus is halted or limited and make recommendations on how to proceed with our daily operations. Managers shall familiarize themselves with the current issues, identify resources to assist and recommend next steps. The Executive Director shall always keep the Board of Commissioners informed. **Decisions to cease or limit operations shall be at the direction of the Executive Director or Board of Commissioners.**

If it is necessary to cease operations of the PHA, we will communicate this via our website, emails and the media. Our phone lines will continue to operate, and messages can be left which will be forwarded to staff who will monitor these messages. All messages are being forwarded at this time to our PHA receptionist.

III. Prevention Efforts:

The PHA will make reasonable efforts to control the spread of the virus through commonly known personal practices and work practices. Information will be disseminated to staff and residents about coughing/sneezing etiquette, washing of hands and staying home if you are sick. We will make additional efforts to sanitize those areas frequented by staff and residents such as the lobbies, bathrooms, waiting room, meeting space and elevators. An emphasis will be made on those areas which come into frequent contact with hands. We will utilize appropriate disinfectants as identified by health officials and whenever possible use green cleaning products which serve as a qualified disinfectant.

The success of any prevention effort must rely upon the good judgement of individuals in our sphere of living. If an individual is sick, has symptoms or is known to have the virus, they must stay home and prevent the spread to others. Employees will be asked to stay at home, residents are asked to remain in their apartments and seek assistance from family members or others to provide for their basic necessities. Residents displaying signs of illness may be asked to leave offices and common areas by staff. If a State of Emergency is declared by an act of the government, we must all follow the instructions provided regardless of any inconveniences it may cause in our lives.

PHA is locking its office doors. Notices will be posted giving phone numbers to call and there are locking drop boxes being provided. If access is allowed for limited purposes, PHA requests the resident/participant stay at least at minimum 6 feet from the front desk or the maximum length the office allows if under 6 feet. A PHA employee will ask you the nature of your visit to the office. If dropping off paperwork is nature of the visit, the resident/participant will be asked to drop it off in the mailbox just outside the office. Resident/participants will be encouraged to use the telephone as a first option in interacting with PHA employees. If a visit is necessary to accomplish a task, after phone call, they may be allowed as long as the above protocol is followed.

IV. Operational Protocols:

Leasing/Voucher Issuance: While service delivery of documents and applications are curtailed due to community health concerns, PHA will try to assist our clients to the extent feasible through electronic or written means (mail). Public Housing applications will be made downloadable from the PHA website: www.pawthousing.org and emailed to kgiraldo@pawthousing.org. Housing Choice Vouchers can be made to the statewide waiting list online. Special vouchers programs will be handled on a case by case basis. If the applicant does not appear to be ill or report having any exposure, units may be shown to no more than 1 or 2 persons, using hygienic precautions but limited personal contact with applicants for processing applications. If original documents must be seen and copied, limited entry into the building may be allowed (lobby only), maintain distance, wear gloves. For all other documents dropped off in a box, allow them to sit more than 24 hours before processing.

Leases will be sent electronically or by mail followed up with phone conversations to review the lease and other pertinent documents. Showing of units will be done in person if possible. Move in/move outs inspections may be waived during any office closure or if staff is unavailable because of actions being taken. If a move out inspection cannot occur, security deposits shall be returned minus any unpaid rent. Lease enforcement will continue to the extent complaints can be followed up via emails, texts or phone calls. PHA shall continue to comply with state and federal regulations as it relates to the enforcement of lease provisions.

Voucher lease ups shall continue to the extent possible. Paperwork shall continue to be processed, subject to staff availability, via email or regular mail. Phone conversations shall be documented. Lease up inspections shall continue to the extent possible subject to additional regulatory guidance from the U.S. Dept. of Housing & Urban Development and availability of staff. Voucher issuance may be suspended if a quarantine or discretion given staff in this protocol, if staffing is limited or unavailable and is subject to governmental action.

Program eligibility; Annual/interim Recertifications: Until further notice, PHA will use a household's previous interim/annual action for income and asset info for the household's next annual recertification. If the household has experienced a decrease in income since the last action, please call PHA staff responsible for your recertification to report this. PHA will make note of this report and do everything feasible to verify the decrease in income through third party sources, fax, email, or scanned documents. If these efforts fail, PHA will contact the household and ask they drop off necessary documents in a drop box at the office and will process the action. Households will be reminded of this policy when their annual recertification packets are mailed.

Inspections: In order to comply with virus containment protocols, inspections may continue if conditions allow. Conditions which may affect inspections include, but are not limited to, availability of staff; additional regulatory guidance; known conditions of occupants of the units to be inspected and government restrictions. PHA will use outside inspectors if they are available.

Inspectors may delay annual inspections through March 31, 2021 or as extended by HUD or they may conduct them where people appear not to be ill, if they can limit the number of people they come in contact with, maintain hygienic precautions, and use personal protective gear. PHA staff may exercise discretion and prudent judgement for their own protection and to stop virus spread. PHA will not allow inspection of units where a known COVID19 case exists.

Maintenance: PHA will use extreme caution when required to perform work in common areas and individual units. If sick, personnel will be asked to remain home and refrain from performing any work on behalf of PHA. If residents are infected by the virus or showing flu like symptoms, PHA staff may exercise discretion and prudent judgement for their own protection and to stop the virus spread. This includes use of proper protective clothing, goggles, respirators, gloves, face masks and other protective gear as needed. **We are now on Emergency/Urgent, health and safety, vacant unit turnovers and increased hygienic cleanings only!**

Increased attention will be made to cleaning and disinfecting areas with heavy pedestrian traffic and surfaces. Doors, handrails, elevator buttons, intercom panels, for example, should be cleaned several times per day, subject to staffing availability. This does not include properties with private access/single entry ingress. The office will be cleaned regularly by maintenance and workspaces would be cleaned at the end of each business day by office staff.

Maintenance shall take stock of inventory to ensure adequate supplies are in place should there be a disruption of the supply chain. This includes adequate cleaning supplies, as well as any material or equipment necessary for the safe operation of our facilities.

Financial: Our objective during this crisis shall be to continue to receive and make payments for good and services provided and or delivered. Residents are expected to continue to make rent payments in a timely fashion. We request that during this crisis, payments be made via the mail or dropped off at the rent drop box at the Manager's office with a check or money order. Residents may pay by bank check or money order. PHA will work with our software vendor and our bank to determine if we can expand direct deposit payments.

Federal Eviction Moratorium: This week the Centers for Disease Control issued a [federal eviction moratorium](#) for all renters at risk of being evicted to help prevent the spread of coronavirus. The moratorium goes into effect today, September 4, and lasts through June 30 2021. The order applies to states and territories with reported cases of coronavirus. Qualified renters must provide a signed declaration to their landlord. The federal eviction moratorium includes a sample declaration. Renters can still be evicted for the following reasons: (1) conducting criminal activity on the property; (2) damaging the property; (3) violating building codes, health ordinances; and (4) violating the rental contract (other than the timely payment of rent, late fees, etc.). Rhode Island Courts are requiring landlord to give a resident 62 years of age or older to be given 60-day notification instead of a 30-day notification.

Revenue: Staff will process deposits. Should the PHA be hampered in its ability to collect and record payments, action will be made upon any household for non-payment of rent and assessment for late fees beginning September 6, 2020. Until such time as mail delivery is suspended, we will regularly check our mailbox to receive and record payments.

Accounts Payables will be processed if staff are available. Every effort will be made to reach out to vendors and keep them informed of when payments can be expected if we are unable to process them when they are due. Payments to landlords and tenant utility assistance payments will be processed. Priority will be given to direct deposits. Those requiring a check to be processed shall be completed subject to availability of staff. If the PHA's ability to process payments to its landlords and vendors is impeded due to government action or the lack of staff due to this crisis, it is understood that all past-due payments shall be made upon the earliest possible ability to process said payments.

Communication will be made with all our landlords to keep them informed of our situation and to ask that they not take any adverse action against participants in the Housing Choice Voucher Program should payments be delayed. This shall be done through written communication and our web site.

V. Travel & Training:

PHA directs all training and travel be discontinued. Virtual trainings are encouraged for staff when the opportunity presents itself. Staff that decides to travel for personal reasons will need to self-quarantine for 14 days upon returning from any state that is listed at <https://health.ri.gov/covid/travel/>. Staff upon return from out of state travel may schedule an asymptomatic test to return to work, if such testing is allowable as the information is changing daily.

VI. Social Gatherings:

PHA will not conduct and will authorize limited gatherings of residents at all developments. If residents do gather it will not consist of more than 15. Limited access to community and conference rooms as these are closed to the general public and should be avoided as the PHA will discourage gatherings organized by 15 or more residents. As of October 22, 2020, due to the increase in COVID cases in the state, all community rooms have been closed or allowable access has been decreased based upon the information the PHA has obtained from the RI Department of Health.

By March 26th, more than half of our resident population will be fully vaccinated. In April, we will begin opening our community rooms to a limited number of residents. Residents wishing to utilize the community room will need to provide their COVID vaccination card if asked by a PHA employee. For tracking purposes, residents will need to sign-in when entering the community room. The PHA is also contemplating bringing back the Meal Site to Fogarty Manor within the next 2 to 3 months as the weather gets better and windows can be opened for ventilation.