



115 Scranton Avenue
Falmouth, MA 02540
Tel: (508) 548-1977
Fax: (508) 457-7573
TDD 1-866-545-1833, Ext. 185
www.falmouthhousing.org

INFECTIOUS DISEASES / COVID-19 POLICY

Purpose

The Falmouth Housing Authority is an essential business because it provides shelter to vulnerable populations. As such, the housing authority recognizes that infectious disease outbreaks, such as COVID-19, require that procedures be put into place to increase safety precautions by implementing strategies for staff and tenants to limit exposure to and the spread of disease(s).

Definition

Infectious Disease: Per the Mayo Clinic, infectious diseases are disorders caused by organisms – such as bacteria, viruses, fungi or parasites. Many organisms live in and on [the body]. They are normally harmless or even helpful. But under certain conditions, some organisms may cause disease. Some infectious diseases can be passed from person to person . . . Each infectious disease has its own specific sign and symptoms. General signs and symptoms common to a number of infectious diseases include fever, diarrhea, fatigue, muscle aches and coughing.

COVID-19: Per the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a respiratory illness that can spread from person to person. Data suggests that symptoms may appear in as few as 2 days or as long as 14 days after exposure to the virus that causes COVID-19. Symptoms can include fever, cough, difficulty breathing, and shortness of breath.

The virus causing COVID-19 is called SARS-CoV-2. It is thought to spread mainly from person-to-person via respiratory droplets among close contacts. Respiratory droplets are produced when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or talks and can land in the mouths or noses, or possibly be inhaled into the lungs, of people who are nearby.

Close contact may include:

- Being within approximately 6 feet of an individual with COVID-19 for a prolonged period of time.
- Having direct contact with body fluids (such as blood, phlegm, and respiratory droplets) from an individual with COVID-19.

Recent studies indicate that people who are infected but do not have symptoms likely also play a role in the spread of COVID-19.

Government means federal, state, or local Town governing bodies

Policy

The Executive Director or their assigned designee will declare the Falmouth Housing Authority to be either fully closed or closed to the public should the government declare an outbreak with stay at home orders. Fully closed means that the building will not be open to staff or the public; non-essential staff will be offered the opportunity to use all accrued benefit hours (i.e. vacation, sick, personal, comp). Essential staff will work (remotely or in-house based on government order or best practice guidance) to perform the urgent and necessary functions to maintain the program integrity of the housing authority.

Closed to the public means that administrative office remains open for staff to work but the building will be closed to the general public. All regular functions of the housing authority will continue to be performed through measures ensuring no personal contact with the general public.

During all periods of closure, communication with the public will be conducted via telephone, mail, drop box, email, facsimile and virtual technology, if available. Communications with tenants of the housing authority will be conducted via the posting of flyers, direct mail, and telephone (person-to-person, automated) calls.

In all cases, the housing authority will remain closed for the briefest period of time possible in accordance with the government recommendations.

The Falmouth Housing Authority will not allow employees to come to work if they declare that they have been determined to have the virus as described by the outbreak notices issued by the government and/or have been exposed to someone that is showing any symptoms of the virus related to the outbreak. Employees entitled to make use of Families First Coronavirus Response Act benefits shall provide proof of documentation in support of said leave. In addition, employees entitled to exercise their rights under FFCR sick leave must be cleared by a physician to return to work.

The Falmouth Housing Authority will communicate with the local Board of Health and/or appropriate town and state official(s) to determine whether or not the site of the confirmed cases may be released. This will be done so that those residing at the site and staff will be aware of the affected location and notification, if deemed appropriate, to the tenants will be made.

The Falmouth Housing Authority will modify its regular processes as follows, based on guidance provided by the government or, in the absence of such guidance decisions will be based upon best practices:

1. Work with essential staff to determine which processes, if any, may be done remotely (see remote work policy) and securely to ensure protection of data and systems.
 - a. *Essential staff are:*
 - i. Executive Director
 - ii. Assistant Director
 - iii. Fiscal Officer
 - iv. Service Coordinator
 - v. Maintenance Foreman
 - vi. Maintenance Mechanic Laborer/Technicians
 - b. *Non-essential staff are:*
 - i. Receptionist(s)
 - ii. Executive, Maintenance and Programs Assistant(s)
 - iii. Tenant Selector
 - iv. State Certification Clerk

- v. Housing Specialist(s)
- c. In the event of *full office closure (meaning, the office is closed both to the public and administrative staff to perform work in-house)*, essential staff will be required to perform the below procedures to complete urgent and necessary work to ensure the program integrity of the housing authority as follows:
 - i. Phones – Calls will be answered by an answering service; emergency calls will be routed from the answering service to the maintenance department
 - ii. Mail will be sent and delivered through the use of a mail receptacle located outside of the housing authority
 - iii. Applications will be accessible for submission on line and via mail delivery
 - iv. Procurement will be performed by the Fiscal Officer
 - v. Briefings, lease ups and recertifications will be conducted through drop box, mail, telephone and virtual contact options, if available.
 - vi. Rents will be processed through drop box and mail delivery; receipts will be mailed to tenants.
 - vii. Payroll, accounts receivable and accounts payable will be processed as scheduled
 - viii. Assigned staff will conduct wellness checks, provide links to community resources, provide quarantine activities by mail, online, telephone for tenants.
- d. In the event of *closure to the public only*, management will determine non-essential task assignments and alternatives, if necessary, to the work schedule to ensure that mandated implementations from the government and best practices are observed. Every effort will be made to maintain standard work schedules and safe work environment(s).
- 2. Maintenance Mechanic Laborer/Technicians and the Foreman are essential staff. Special procedures will be observed during all closures as follows:
 - a. Unit Inspections will cease, unless there is an emergency reason to enter the unit
 - b. Sanitizing of all common areas daily, and more frequently if staff capacity allows
 - c. Removal of common area furniture to prevent social gathering
 - d. Perform emergency work orders only*, wear protective gear (i.e. masks, gloves, goggles) and pre-sanitize all areas that will be touched during the unit entry, unit exit and repair area.
*If an exiting routine work order is in the system and both the staff & tenant agree that the work should be performed during the emergency work order access, the routine work order may be completed. On all work orders, prior to unit entry, the tenant must be queried as to whether or not they have been knowingly exposed to the virus and all tenants must agree to quarantine themselves (i.e. restroom, bedroom) to ensure social separation during the repair(s). If maintenance is not able to perform the emergency work order, a vendor will be contacted to perform the work order. Maintenance will be encouraged to work on outdoor projects, maintenance administrative tasks as assigned, and unit turnovers.
- 3. **Public meetings** will be conducted, based on guidance provided by the State of Massachusetts, via approved platforms (i.e. virtual or teleconferencing platforms); access to the meeting will be provided on the agenda. Agendas are posted at the Town of Falmouth and sent out electronically; and on our website
- 4. **Hardship Exemption to Falmouth Housing Authority Tenants:** The housing authority must grant an exemption from payment of minimum rent if the family is unable to pay minimum rent because of financial hardship (24 CFR 5.630 and/or applicable state regulations). The housing authority will notify all families of their right to request a minimum rent hardship exemption and advise them that hardship exemptions are subject to applicable information hearing procedures. Families will be provided with information regarding how to request an exemption, the process for exemption evaluation, and their grievance rights should an exemption request be denied. Families cannot request a hardship exemption if the family's calculated tenant portion of payment is higher than the minimum rent.

Financial hardships may include any of the following situations:

- a. When the family has lost eligibility for or is waiting for an eligibility determination for federal, state or local assistance program,
- b. When the family would be evicted as a result of the imposition of the minimum rent requirement,
- c. When the income of the family has decreased because of changed circumstances, including loss of employment,
- d. When a death has occurred in the family
- e. When the family has an increase in expenses because of changed circumstances, for medical costs, childcare, transportation, education or similar items.

5. **As-needed remote work policy:** Telecommuting arrangements would be temporary in nature, made on a case-by-case basis and will focus first on the business needs of the housing authority, and the protection of client data and software/hardware systems.
- a. *Time worked:* Telecommuting employees will be required to accurately record all hours worked using the housing authority's time-keeping documentation/system. Hours worked in excess of those scheduled per day and per work week require advance approval of the telecommuter's supervisor. Failure to comply with this requirement may result in the immediate termination of the telecommuting agreement.
 - b. *Safety:* Telecommuting employees are expected to maintain their home work space in a safe manner, free from safety hazards. The housing authority will provide to each telecommuting employee a safety checklist that must be completed before a telework schedule is assigned. Injuries sustained by the employee in the home office location and in conjunction their regular work duties will be covered by FHA's worker's compensation policy. Telecommuting employees are responsible for notifying the housing authority of such injuries as soon as practicable. The telecommuting employee is liable for any injuries sustained by visitors/others in their home/work space.
 - c. *Equipment:* On a case-by-case basis, the housing authority will determine, with information supplied by the telecommuting employee and the supervisor, the appropriate equipment needs (including hardware, software, modems, phone and data lines and other office equipment) for each telecommuting arrangement. Equipment supplied by the housing authority will be maintained by the housing authority. Equipment supplied by the telecommuting employee, if deemed appropriate by the housing authority, will be maintained by the telecommuting employee; the housing authority accepts no responsibility for damage or repairs to employee-owned equipment. The housing authority reserves the right to make determinations as to appropriate equipment, subject to change at any time. Equipment supplied by the housing authority is to be used for business purposes only. The telecommuting employee must sign an inventory of all housing authority property received and agree to take appropriate action to protect the items from damage or theft. Upon termination of employment, all housing authority property will be returned to the housing authority, unless other arrangements have been made.
 - d. *Supplies:* The housing authority will supply the telecommuting employee with appropriate office supplies (pens, paper, etc.) as deemed necessary. The housing authority will also reimburse the telecommuting employee for business-related expenses, such as phone calls

and shipping costs, that are reasonably incurred in carrying out the telecommuting employee's job.

- e. *Work space:* The employee will establish an appropriate work environment within their home for work purposes. The housing authority will not be responsible for costs associated with the setup of the telecommuting employee's home office, such as remodeling, furniture or lighting, nor for repairs or modifications to the home office space.
- f. *Security:* Consistent with housing authority's expectation of information security for employees working in the office (i.e. data, interaction with clients), telecommuting employees will be expected to ensure the protection of housing authority information brought to and/or accessed from their home work spaces. Steps include the use of locked cabinet files and desks, regular password maintenance, and any other measures appropriate for the task assignment and the work environment.
- g. *Oversight:* All telecommuting arrangements will include frequent interaction (i.e. meetings, phone, e-mail, and/or virtual technology) between the telecommuting employee and their supervisor. An appropriate level of communication between the telecommuting employee and supervisor will be agreed to as part of the telecommuting agreement.

Approved by Board of Commissioners on 4/7/20