

# TEWKSBURY HOUSING AUTHORITY

## CORONAVIRUS RESPONSE PLAN - MARCH 19, 2020

### Introduction:

The Tewksbury Housing Authority is monitoring the current viral outbreak formally known as the 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](http://www.cdc.gov)

The Maine Center for Disease Control: [www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc](http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc)

The World Health Organization: [www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus](http://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus)

The National Institutes of Health: [www.nih.gov/health-information/coronavirus](http://www.nih.gov/health-information/coronavirus)

### Call 211

For the next two work weeks (then we will re-assess): the THA wants 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 the THA 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.

### Communication:

The best efforts to combat a serious health issue like COVID-19 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 THA web page, 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 phone call, 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 THA office;**

**Protocols for completing work orders in resident's homes;**

**Responding to emergency calls;**

**Inspections;**

**New lease ups;**

**Use of outside vendors;**

**Residents/Participants:**

The THA currently serves over 300 households and therefore communication with them may be limited to letters, use of the webpage and THA Facebook page. 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 THA office, they must comply. THA staff are instructed to call TPD if a resident fails to remove themselves from the office when requested to do so by THA staff. No resident will be penalized for late report due to social distancing efforts at this time. 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 are encouraged to take appropriate measures to have sufficient food and supplies on hand in the event that a quarantine is instituted.

**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 the mailbox or with the package.

### **Government Officials:**

The THA staff 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 THA 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 and 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. Authority staff, 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 keep the Board of Commissioners informed at all times. 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 THA, we will communicate this via our webpage, letters 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.

### **Prevention Efforts:**

The THA 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.

The THA is locking its office doors. Notices will be posted giving phone numbers to call and there are drop boxes being provided. If access is allowed for limited purposes, the THA requests the resident/participant stay at least at minimum 6 feet from the front window or the maximum length the office allows if under 6 feet. A THA 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 THA 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.

#### **Operational Protocols:**

**Leasing/Voucher Issuance:** While service delivery is curtailed due to community health concerns, THA 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 THA webpage: <https://www.tewksbury-ma.gov/housing-authority> . Housing Choice Vouchers can be made to the statewide waiting list online. 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.

Public Housing Lease-up's will be temporarily suspended for the next two weeks or until such time that allows for proper protocols regarding face to face contact to remain in place . Move in/move outs inspections may be waived during any office closure or if staff is unavailable because of actions being taken. Lease enforcement will continue to the extent complaints can be followed up via emails, or phone calls. The THA 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, the THA 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 THA staff responsible for your recertification to report this. The THA 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, the THA 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. The THA will use outside inspectors if they are available. Inspectors may delay annual inspections for the next two weeks 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 and maintain hygienic precautions and or use personal protective gear. THA staff may exercise discretion and prudent judgement for their own protection and to stop the virus spread. The THA will not allow inspection of units where a known Covid-19 case exists.

**Maintenance:** The THA 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 the THA. If residents are infected by the virus or showing flu like symptoms, THA staff may exercise discretion and prudent judgement for their own protection and to stop the virus spread. This includes use of proper protective clothing, respirators, gloves, face masks and other protective gear as needed. We are now on Emergency/Urgent, health and safety, vacant unit turn and increased hygienic cleanings only!

Increased attention will be made to cleaning and disinfecting areas with heavy pedestrian traffic and surfaces which come into frequent contact of humans. Doors, handrails, elevator buttons, intercom panels for example should be cleaned at least once per day, subject to staffing availability. Areas requiring priority attention shall be all community rooms and common areas. This does not include properties with private access/single entry ingress. The office will be cleaned regularly by maintenance and 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 should include 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 mailbox or rent drop box with check or money order. Residents may pay by bank check or money order.

**Revenue:** Staff, to the extent possible, shall make every effort to record revenues received and process deposits as needed. Should the THA be hampered in its ability to collect and record payments, no action will be made upon any household for non-payment of rent. Until such time as mail delivery is suspended, we will regularly check our mailbox to receive and record payments.

Accounts Payable will be processed if staff are available and proceeds are on hand to cover expenses. 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 shall be processed provided funds are made available from the federal government. If the PHA's ability to process payments to its landlord and vendors is impeded due to government action or the lack of staff due to this crisis, it is understood that all accrued payments shall be made upon the earliest possible ability to

process said payments. As per HAP agreements, the THA is requesting patience and understanding during this difficult time.

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 should payments be delayed. This shall be done through written communication and email.

**Telework:** The THA intends to follow CDC guidance in respect to our response to the COVID-19 outbreak. CDC recommends that persons at heightened risk of serious illness should work from home if possible. Those health conditions that CDC describes are found at Exhibit A. THA Staff with these conditions or with a household member with these conditions, should work from home.

If you fall into any of these categories, please know that if you want to work from home, THA will support you and help make this happen. Affected staff, please make arrangements with your supervisor who will help coordinate your schedule and work with IT and compliance to set it up.

Additional work at home arrangements may be allowed by the Executive Director on a schedule which will allow for greater social distancing at our office, after considering relief caused by work at home by vulnerable staff members (see above). Whereas not all tasks required to perform the duties can be done at home, every effort will be made between employer and employee to identify work that can be done electronically from home. The THA shall provide computer access through a VPN connection and accordance with prescribed protocols established by our IT partners. All management staff are to confirm connections with IT. In the event proper access cannot be granted due to security concerns or connectivity issues, other means such as emails and phones shall be utilized to the greatest extent feasible.

Maintenance obviously cannot be performed at home therefore maintenance staff shall be designated as standby if it is necessary to close the office for any period of time. Residents will continue to be asked to call into our emergency call line to report any issues requiring immediate attention. Any staff required to perform work at any of our properties shall wear proper protection provided by the THA and utilize safe --work practices at all times. No unauthorized or non-THA approved Personal Protective gear is allowed.

Employees are advised to monitor their health and report any symptoms to their health care provider and local public health officials as necessary. If an employee believes they may have been exposed or are experiencing symptoms, they are asked to stay home and monitor their situation while keeping the THA informed of their status.

#### **Travel & Training:**

THA directs all training and travel be discontinued. THA will process cancelations.

#### **Social Gatherings:**

THA will not conduct or authorize gatherings of residents of more than 10, if they can be avoided and will discourage gatherings organized by residents.

