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MEMORANDUM

Date: March 13, 2020

To: Residents of Porchlight Housing

From: Karla Thennes, Executive Director

Re: COVID-19 (Coronavirus)

Porchlight staff, in conjunction with several other community agencies as well as Public Health Madison & Dane County, has been working hard on both proactive measures and crisis response plans for the spread of the COVID-19 virus. The World Health Organization (WHO) recently categorized Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), as a pandemic, due to its rapid spread and severity. Governor Evers has also declared a Public Health Emergency. While we cannot prevent the spread altogether, engaging in preventative measures is essential in <u>slowing</u> the spread, which will help maintain the capacity of our health system to treat those who are infected and to reduce the lethality of the virus. According to current available data, here are answers to common questions regarding COVID-19:

How is COVID-19 spread?
COVID-19 spreads primarily through person-to-person contact when an infected person coughs or sneezes. Respiratory droplets can land on the mouths or noses of people nearby or be inhaled into the lungs. It is also possible that a person can touch a surface or object that has the virus on it, then touch their own mouth, nose, or eyes. While people are thought to be most contagious when they are symptomatic, some spread may be possible before people show symptoms.

How can I prevent illness due to COVID-19?

Clean your hands often. The most effective way to kill this virus is to wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, making sure to scrub the fronts and backs of your hands, in between your fingers, under your fingernails, and paying special attention to your thumbs. You should wash your hands after being in a public place, and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing. If you cannot wash your hands, use hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. Also, avoid touching your face.

Avoid close contact with people who are sick. Due to low levels of testing up until this point, it is impossible to know who and how many people are infected. For this reason, the newest guidance includes "social distancing", which is staying at least six (6) feet away from other people, and avoiding gatherings with 50 people or more.

Disinfect frequently touched surfaces daily. In your own home, start by cleaning all surfaces with soap and water, then disinfect using any common household disinfectant. Continue to disinfect frequently touched surfaces on a daily basis (e.g. phones, doorknobs, light switches, tables/counters, etc.).

What are symptoms of the virus?
The most common COVID-19 symptoms include fever, cough, and shortness of breath. Symptoms may appear 2-14 days after exposure.

What should I do if I am sick?

Go home and avoid others. If you are displaying any of the symptoms listed, it is in everyone's best interest for you to separate yourself from others in order to slow the spread of the virus. Avoid social gatherings and stay at least six (6) feet away from others at all times. If you are employed, ask your employer about your sick leave policy and/or any possible options for remote work.

Seek medical advice. Due to long waits and limited capacity, many hospitals and clinics are setting up remote triage. Veterans should call nurse triage at (608) 280-7066. Contact your individual health plan to find out about their recommendations and response to COVID-19. You can also reach the UW Health COVID-19 Informational Hotline at (608) 720-5300.

Cover your mouth. If you are coughing or sneezing, cover your mouth with a tissue or the inside of your elbow. Throw used tissues in the trash and wash your hands. Wear a facemask in public if you are sick, or taking care of someone who is sick. Wearing a facemask is not recommended for people who are NOT sick. Facemasks can prevent respiratory droplets from an infected person from entering the air, which is why they are effective for people who are currently sick. The remainder of the limited supply should be saved for those who are treating or caring for those who are sick.

Keep cleaning. The same prevention techniques apply to people who are sick. Continue to wash your hands often and disinfect frequently touched surfaces.

Should I tell my case manager or Porchlight staff if I am sick?
Even in a pandemic, being infected with a virus is considered personal health information. It is your right to decide whether to share that information with staff. However, if you do decide to inform staff, Porchlight may be able to take additional measures to slow the spread of the virus, and help Public Health get an accurate picture of the outbreak.

Should I be worried about severe illness?
Current WHO data indicates that over 80% of COVID-19 cases are mild, where the medical advice is to self-quarantine and recover at home, similar to a flu. Around 20% of cases are severe enough to require hospitalization. The current death rate for identified cases is 3.6%. Individuals most vulnerable to severe illness include those over the age of 60 with underlying conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, and lung disease. Because most of us come in contact with people who would be vulnerable to severe illness or death, it is our collective responsibility to take precautions to slow the spread of the virus to those individuals, as well as to ourselves.

Additional Resources
World Health Organization: https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html
Wisconsin Department of Health Services: https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/disease/covid-19.htm
Public Health Madison & Dane County: https://www.publichealthmdc.com/