

COVID-19 Homecare Tips

In response to ongoing health concerns presented by the COVID-19 virus, SEIU Healthcare MN offers these tips to home care members.

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a respiratory illness that can spread from person to person. Home care workers are on the frontlines of keeping some of the most medically vulnerable Minnesotans safe at home and out of institutional care settings.

Use health and safety precautions

- Wash your hands for 20 seconds at every opportunity
- Don't touch your face without sanitizing first
- Stay home - only go out to get to and from work (the care you provide to your client(s) is defined as "essential" work in Governor Walz's executive order that requires most Minnesotans to stay home starting March 28) and for essential errands
- Avoid having visitors
- Try to stay 6' away from others when you have to go out
- If you have any respiratory symptoms or a fever or have any reason to think you have been infected, do not go out at all. Call a healthcare provider (do not go to the hospital or clinic without calling first) to determine whether you should come in for a COVID-19 test.

Communicate

Have regular conversations with your client about what you need from each other to be and feel safe at this time. What precautions are you taking? What precautions are they taking? How many people are each of you in contact with during this time? If you think you or they may have been exposed to COVID-19, talk with each other to determine how to move forward. Every person's situation is different, so be patient with each other and try to find the best way you can to meet the most needs of everyone involved.

Stay Informed

Check in on updates from the Minnesota Department of Health regularly. We are learning more about this virus every day, and direction from Gov. Walz and public-health authorities frequently changes. So look to MDH for updates often. Please make sure that you're making decisions based on the most recent and accurate information.

Minnesota Department of Health: <https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/index.html>

We have asked state officials to communicate directly with home care workers and clients about current public-health guidance, recommendations on when you should or shouldn't go to work, overtime and sick pay, and the many other questions workers and clients have right now. We've let them know we are very open to supporting them on doing this, and to multiple approaches to how they communicate -- but that it is urgently needed (actually, long overdue) for them to provide this basic information and guidance to home care workers and clients!

Unemployment Insurance

The state's Unemployment Insurance program has been greatly expanded in response to this pandemic, and a number of changes are also being made at the federal level to provide for additional Unemployment Insurance benefits for many workers. If you're unable to work or your hours have been reduced, you may qualify under the current guidelines. To learn more or apply, visit <https://www.uimn.org/>

If you're struggling to navigate the UI system, please contact our Member Action Center. They'll connect you to a Homecare Organizer for support.

Member Action Center: (651) 294-8100 | mac@seiuhcmn.org

Paid Leave

If you've been infected or exposed to COVID-19, you'll need to self-quarantine. The standard recommendation is a quarantine of 14 days. This can be challenging in many ways, but it is essential to protect others and to prevent further spread of the virus. Home care workers deserve to know that, if they have to stay home for two weeks to protect the health of their client(s) and the public, they will be paid for those lost hours of work! We are fighting every day to win new emergency benefits and funding from state and/or federal lawmakers to cover this urgently needed paid leave for home care workers who have to self-quarantine.

Help us build pressure! Use this form to write to your legislators:

https://secure.everyaction.com/JhO_iHe-zEOuUkFZCDyDdg2

Worker Shortage

We were in a crisis-level shortage of homecare workers long before this pandemic, but it's already been made worse by the start of this pandemic and the public-health precautions in place -- and if the pandemic gets as bad as most public health experts expect, it will get far worse still. That's why we are fighting for urgently needed measures to address the crisis, including:

Overtime pay, through new state and/or federal funding. Many home care workers are already working extra hours because of the pandemic, and this would allow any home care worker to be paid time-and-a-half for any hours worked over 40/week (as is required by federal law, but there's no funding from the state of MN to pay for it). If the virus spreads as widely as public health experts predict, many home care workers will have to stop providing services in order to self-quarantine. The only way to provide for the needs of the state's home care clients will be to have the remaining workers work many extra hours. This means funding for overtime pay will be needed, as will lifting the monthly cap on home care workers' hours.

Faster hiring/onboarding for new PCAs. Many people are in need of income during the shelter in place order, and will be available to fill some of the open hours clients have. DHS has been given new authority under one of Gov. Walz's recent executive orders to waive various rules and requirements in home care programs that would normally be in place. So far the only rule they've waived is the one requiring assessments and reassessments to be conducted in person. But DHS could take additional actions to speed up the often lengthy process required to get PCAs approved to start working.

Please also remember to use this online tool to connect clients needing workers with workers needing clients: <https://www.directsupportconnect.org/>

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and cleaning supplies

Workers and clients should have access to gloves, masks, and in some cases other forms of higher-level PPE, and should have access to basic cleaning supplies like hand sanitizer and disinfecting wipes, but store shelves are nearly empty of all these products and most people don't have stockpiles at home. We need the federal government to provide these things for us, so we can keep ourselves, our families, our clients, and their families safe! There's new funding for PPE for healthcare workers in the federal stimulus bill, but no language allowing for that PPE to go to those of us providing home care. In the meantime while we fight for federal provision of these essential items, we've built a mutual aid tool as a way for community members to share supplies and other resources (including care hours) throughout the state. Please use it to request things you may need, or to offer extra supplies if you have them! <http://seiu.mn/mutualaidhcreponse>

Workers not being able to get to their clients

Thanks to the efforts of our union, Gov. Walz defined home care workers as "essential" in his executive order directing Minnesotans to shelter in place starting March 28, meaning our travel from home to work and back is exempted from the executive order's restrictions. However, we know that a number of apartment-building managers across the state have been blocking home care workers from entering their buildings, leaving their clients without care. We have demanded that the state create an official letter or other document and provide it to every home care worker in the state, to serve as proof that they are home care workers and have been deemed essential workers by the governor.

Census!

Things may seem very hopeless at the moment, but we'd like to remind you that filling out your census form is one concrete thing you can do right now that will make a big difference. Everyone needs to be counted, so that we can get the proper funding necessary to keep critical programs like ours afloat. For any questions, please visit: <http://2020census.gov/>

What can we do to address this crisis?

We need our lawmakers to take this crisis seriously, and provide homecare workers and clients with proper PPE, overtime pay, and emergency sick pay when quarantine is needed. Please take this easy step to tell this to your representatives, and we'll keep you posted on our progress:

https://secure.everyaction.com/JhO_iHe-zEOuUkFZCDyDdg2