
Harm Reduction Program **Guidance for Continuity of Services During COVID-19**

Harm Reduction services, including but not limited to syringe services and overdose prevention, have been deemed essential services during the COVID-19 pandemic by the New Mexico Department of Health (NMDOH). This includes sites operated by NMDOH directly at Public Health Offices (PHO) and sites operated by community-based contract partner organizations.

All sites should continue providing activities whenever feasible, including syringe services, overdose prevention and education, distribution of Naloxone, navigation to other medical services including Medication Assisted Therapy (MAT) and medical providers that offer curative treatment for hepatitis C virus (HCV).

Per the guidance and state regulations that govern Harm Reduction services and particularly syringe service activities, the NMDOH Harm Reduction Program must be informed in advance of any changes to days, hours and locations of program sites. This is important to ensure coverage and access across the state, as well as coordination to prevent duplication.

The Harm Reduction Program will continue to provide training and guidance in adapting program sites and services to minimize the chance of COVID-19 transmission among program staff, volunteers and participants. The following strategies should be used by all sites.

- Encourage respiratory hygiene for all program participants and staff. This means covering the nose and mouth when coughing and sneezing with an elbow or tissue and immediately throwing away the tissue. Individuals should also avoid touching their face as much as possible.
- Masks and gloves should be worn by staff when available. Cloth masks should be used if regular surgical masks are not available. Due to an ongoing shortage in medical supplies, it is preferable for staff and volunteers not to use N95 masks.
- If available, cloth masks should be provided to program participants. Program participants should be educated on how to create their own masks utilizing a t-shirt or similar item.
- Reinforce correct hand washing with soap and water. If soap and water is not available, it is acceptable to use alcohol-based hand sanitizer with an alcohol percentage of at least 60%. All program sites should have a cleaning station – such as a sink with soap or a sanitizer dispenser installed – available to program participants.
- Avoid contact with anyone with cold or flu-like symptoms. These individuals should be encouraged to contact a medical provider or seek testing. Testing locations can be found at <https://cvprovider.nmhealth.org/directory.html>.
- To avoid having unnecessary close contact among participants, the program is recommending that all mobile outreaches temporarily suspend allowing program participants inside mobile outreach vehicles. Instead, conduct outreach and participant

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engagement outdoors, unless there is a need for confidentiality such as for HIV or HCV testing services.

- Ensure regular cleaning and sanitizing of high touch surfaces at least once per day.
- Temporarily suspend buffet-style, self-service dispensing of program supplies and works. Program staff should ask clients if they need each item and then the staff/volunteer will hand them over. This will reduce the amount of times works are being touched. Pre-packaged kits of works are discouraged in most circumstances, and program participants should still be asked what works they need.
- All locations are authorized to conduct home based delivery services and move harm reduction services outside at fixed site locations. Please inform the NMDOH Harm Reduction Program if new home base delivery services are being offered.
- Staff at higher risk of severe complications of COVID-19 as defined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) should be encouraged to perform other tasks supporting of harm reduction programs from home, as they are able.

The following recommendations are specific to overdose prevention and Naloxone distribution.

- Overdose prevention and education and naloxone training should be modified to encourage social distancing of at least 6 feet.
- Naloxone should always be used first to reduce the potential need for rescue breathing. Brief contact closer than 6 feet for the usage of Naloxone, or to check if someone is breathing, poses small risk for COVID-19 transmission that has the significant potential benefit of reducing harm from overdose.
- Rescue breathing presents a risk of COVID-19 transmission, even with the use of a rescue breathing face mask.
- Program participants should be educated on these potential risks, so they can make informed decisions.
- Program participants should continue to be educated about the state's Good Samaritan Law and calling 911 in all overdose situations.
- Not using alone should be heavily emphasized, even during social distancing.
- Individuals with phones are encouraged to call someone they know so they can stay on the phone with them while they use. An option that is available to individuals who use substances is the national never use alone hotline. The number is 800-484-3731 and more information can be found at www.neverusealone.com.

Additional information on COVID-19 in New Mexico can be found at <https://cv.nmhealth.org/>. If there are any questions related to this guidance, please contact Hepatitis and Harm Reduction Program Manager Josh Swatek at Joshua.Swatek@state.nm.us or 505-827-3260.