

**Strategies used to prevent the spread of COVID-19 are especially difficult for individuals with intellectual disabilities and related conditions receiving services through ICFs/IID and waiver programs such as HCS and TxHmL.**

Individuals may find it challenging to understand and adhere to recommendations for minimizing the spread of COVID-19. Staff may need to provide additional support and closer supervision to ensure infection control measures are followed such as:

➤ **Refraining from touching their face**

- Ensure the skin on the individual's face is clean and moisturized, not dry or irritated.
- Ensure eyeglasses, hearing aids and dentures are clean and comfortable.
- Ensure men are shaven, if they shave regularly.
- Ensure there are no sores or other causes of pain within the mouth, and that regular oral hygiene is completed.
- Ensure lips are adequately hydrated, and not chapped or dry.
- Ensure noses are clear and dry.
- Provide activities or fidgets to keep the individual's hands occupied.
- Use simple words and pictures to explain to individuals why it is important that they not touch their face with unclean hands.

➤ **Practicing hand hygiene**

- Place individuals on a supervised hand hygiene schedule. Have staff provide demonstration and encouragement while washing their own hands or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Encourage individuals to sing a song or use a timer to remind them to wash their hands or use hand sanitizer for at least 20 seconds.



- If the individual is unable to complete hand hygiene on their own or with prompting, wear gloves to perform this task for the person.
- Put moisturizer on individuals' clean and dry hands as needed to prevent cracked or irritated skin.
- Put picture reminders on the bathroom wall to remind everyone how to wash their hands. The [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](https://www.cdc.gov) (CDC) website has resources for pictures and posters that may be helpful.
- Use simple words and pictures to explain to individuals why hand hygiene is important. Consider watching a handwashing video from a trustworthy site like the CDC with individuals.

➤ **Wearing a mask or cloth face covering**

- Demonstrate how to put on and take off a mask or cloth face covering and assist individuals who need help.
- Teach individuals to put on and take off their own masks or cloth face coverings.
- Do not put a mask or cloth face covering on an individual who cannot remove it independently. Teach the individual how to remove the mask or cloth face covering, or do not use it.
- Use simple words and pictures to explain to individuals the importance of wearing a mask or cloth face covering.
- Help individuals increase their tolerance for wearing a mask or cloth face covering.
- Allow individuals to design their own mask or cloth face covering, and consider turning the activity into a decorating contest.
- Ensure each individual has more than one mask or cloth face covering so they have a choice of which one to wear each day.
- Try different styles and shapes of masks or cloth face coverings to find what is most comfortable for each individual.
- Model appropriate use of masks or cloth facial coverings.



➤ **Maintaining social distancing**

- Encourage individuals to stay in their own rooms and redirect them back to their own rooms if they come out.

- Provide individuals with their own activities they can do in their rooms. Do not share activity supplies with other individuals unless properly sanitized.
- Use simple words and pictures to explain to individuals why it is important to stay in their rooms.
- Rearrange furniture in the common areas (dining room, living room, game room) to ensure at least 6 feet of separation between seats so individuals who do not stay in their own rooms maintain social distancing.
- Place signs on the floors, walls or furniture to indicate where it is safe to sit or stand.
- Ensure only one person sits on a couch at a time, or consider temporarily replacing couches with single person seating.
- Take turns utilizing common areas.
- Encourage individuals to eat in their rooms with appropriate supervision. For those who are not able to eat in their rooms, stagger dining times, rearrange furniture and utilize common areas other than the dining room to allow for social distancing and to allow for one-on-one assistance for those who need it.
- Encourage virtual visits with friends and family via phone, video chatting, email, social media and text messaging. Try a variety of options to find one the individual is comfortable with.
- Ensure that needed adaptive devices, such as hearing aids, eyeglasses, and communication devices are available to the individual when participating in virtual visits.



**Every individual will respond to this situation differently. Be prepared to try a variety of approaches to help individuals feel safe and reassured.**

➤ **General recommendations**

- Try to stick to a daily routine.
- Use simple words and pictures to explain what is happening and what to expect each day.
- Ensure individuals get enough sleep.

- Offer individuals a healthy, balanced diet.
- Break down required tasks into small steps and guide individuals step by step, prompting with words or pictures as needed.
- Allow and assist individuals to shop online when they request shopping trips.
- Allow individuals to order their favorite take-out.
- Organize a folder for each individual they can take with them if they need to go to the hospital. Include information on the individual's:
  - medical needs (i.e., diagnosis of diabetes, high blood pressure, anxiety, hearing loss)
  - medications (prescription and over-the-counter)
  - adaptive aids (i.e., walker, splints, glasses)
  - dietary requirements (i.e., chopped texture, thickened liquids)
  - communication abilities and needs (i.e., signs, pictures, gestures, words)
  - contact information (for legally authorized representatives, guardians, family members, etc.)
  - likes and dislikes

➤ **If individuals express concern about the pandemic, staff should:**

- Provide simple, truthful answers to their questions from reliable sources (i.e., CDC, Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, Department of State Health Services, Texas Health and Human Services Commission).
- Take the time to listen to individuals and their concerns.
- Validate individuals' feelings.
- Provide reassurance that everyone is doing all they can to keep the individuals safe and healthy.
- Not discuss their own opinions or concerns about the pandemic in front of individuals.
- Remind individuals of the things they can do to help so they do not feel helpless (i.e., not touching their face with unclean hands, hand hygiene, wearing a mask or cloth face covering, social distancing, staying in their room).

➤ **Individuals may exhibit challenging behaviors due to:**

- Anxiety
- Fear
- Sadness
- Depression

- Loneliness
- Boredom
- Lack of knowledge about the situation
- Changes in routine
- Misunderstanding information

➤ **Standard calming techniques such as distraction and redirection should be used if needed. Additional activities include:**

- Listening to their favorite music
- Watching a preferred television show or movie
- Dancing
- Stretching or exercise videos while ensuring social distancing
- Podcasts
- Reading or books on tape
- Arts and crafts
- Activity books
- Jigsaw puzzles (limit each puzzle to a single individual and sanitize before passing it on to another)
- Crossword or word find puzzles
- Online games that allow interaction
- Virtual church services
- Meditation or breathing exercises
- Planting flowers
- Writing letters or sending pictures to loved ones



➤ **Use regular daily activities to teach residents skills such as:**

- Hand washing and sanitizing
- Counting to 20 (for hand hygiene)
- Measuring 6 feet (for social distancing)
- Tying (for cloth face coverings that tie)
- Cough etiquette
- Caring for dentures and adaptive aids
- Oral hygiene
- Skin care
- Laundry (only their own items)

- Sanitizing their own rooms (including door knobs, light switches, drawer pulls, surfaces, etc.) and personal belongings
- Sanitizing their own eating area after mealtime
- Selecting an activity to do while practicing infection control and social distancing
- Using electronic devices (for activities and maintaining contact with friends and family)
- Spelling and writing (for activities and writing letters to friends and family)
- Reading (for messages from friends and family, menus, online shopping, etc.)

**Now, more than ever, staff's knowledge of the individuals is extremely important. Putting the person before the task allows every task to be an opportunity for engagement. Person-centered care decreases disruptive behaviors which may occur due to inconsistencies in daily routines, boredom, loneliness, or a sense of helplessness, therefore helping to prevent the spread of COVID-19.**

NOTE: Suggestions in this handout are subject to all federal, state and local rules and regulations. We encourage you to stay current with CDC and Texas Department of State Health Services recommendations as well as with any additional guidance from CMS and Texas HHSC that may be applicable to your setting.