

Effective: May 6/2020	Last Reviewed/Revised:	Next Review By: Ongoing
Author: Director, Talent and Culture		Approved by: Executive Director
This policy should be read and understood by NYCH:		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Full-time Employees	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Independent Contractors	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Part-time Employees	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Volunteers	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Placement Students	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Board of Directors and Officers	

COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE POLICY

North York Community House (“NYCH”) is committed to minimizing risk and protecting the health and safety of our employees, volunteers, clients, participants and community members during an emergency. The goal of this policy is to balance risk with the service needs of the community, especially essential services.

Specifically, this policy addresses the outbreak of the coronavirus COVID-19, and its impact on NYCH’s employees, volunteers, clients, participants, community members, and operations.

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses which may cause illness in animals or humans. In humans, several coronaviruses are known to cause respiratory infections ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). The most recently discovered coronavirus causes coronavirus disease COVID-19.

COVID-19 is the infectious disease caused by the most recently discovered coronavirus. This new virus and disease were unknown before the outbreak began in Wuhan, China, in December 2019. COVID-19 was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization in March 2020.

With the occurrence and ongoing development of the COVID-19 outbreak, North York Community House commits to:

- Making every reasonable effort to maintain provision of core programs and services even when NYCH locations need to be closed temporarily
- Regular communication and information sharing among staff, management and volunteer teams to ensure all have the most up-to-date public health information, decisions regarding NYCH, and most effective practices and procedures to protect everyone’s health
- Keeping programs and services available open during regular scheduled hours as appropriate to the circumstance, and providing programs and services online wherever possible
- Determining the closure of NYCH locations and/or services as deemed necessary
- Providing service availability status updates to the public, clients, and program participants

- Working with partner organizations to meet changing community needs in whatever ways are possible and effective
- Providing employees with the appropriate tools and training they need to work effectively from home if necessary
- Coordinating and directing available resources toward the mitigation, response and recovery from this situation.

PROCEDURES: ADAPTING PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Updates and Communication

NYCH's senior management team will continue to monitor information from Toronto Public Health, the Public Health Agency of Canada, World Health Organization, and other reliable sources, and provide regular updates to staff and volunteers around latest developments, and decisions regarding program, service, and site interruptions and/or closures.

Everyone at NYCH is encouraged to follow developments through reliable public health resources as well and share relevant updates from partners regarding further developments in our communities.

<https://www.toronto.ca/community-people/health-wellness-care/diseases-medications-vaccines/coronavirus/>

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/coronavirus-disease-covid-19.html>

Prevention

As experts have stated, preventative measures are the most important actions that can be taken. Everyone at NYCH needs to have a heightened awareness of this and ensure we are consciously, diligently taking steps to protect our own health, those around us, and all of the people we work with and serve. We know this virus targets individuals who are older, have suppressed immune systems and/or have respiratory illnesses.

Everyone at NYCH is expected to adhere to the following protocols:

- washing our hands thoroughly and often, not touching eyes, nose or mouth
- using hand sanitizer as a temporary measure until proper hand washing is available
- extra cleaning through the day, wiping surfaces, phones, touchscreens, keyboards, and in shared areas such as meeting and program rooms, wiping down door handles, tables, phones, chair arms, etc. frequently
- trying to maintain physical distance from others and avoiding unnecessary contact such as shaking hands
- staying home if sick, and not returning to work until we have been symptom-free for at least 24 hours
- reminding participants, volunteers and colleagues in a respectful way to stay home if any of the above are a concern.

- notifying/reminding clients that they will be asked to leave if they come to NYCH for a program or appointment (when sites are open and programs are running in person) and are sick or symptomatic, but may receive support by phone, e-mail or online; recommending they contact a health care provider/public health
- continuing to ask screening questions to clients about:
 - Their recent travel history
 - If they are feeling sick
 - If they have been in contact with others who have travelled recently and/or are sick
- notifying all clients and participants (current or potential) who have travelled outside Canada in the last 14 days that they must wait another 14 days before attending an appointment/visiting a site in person.

Limiting and Possible Closure of Programs and Sites

- NYCH's Executive Director will make final decisions around the closure and re-opening of our sites and programs.
- NYCH's senior and management teams will continue to monitor directions from public health, or changes in partner supports/space that indicate program/site closures.
- Senior management will continue to provide updates around closures and plans for staff in terms of alternate work arrangements. (See below ***'Site Closures and Working Remotely'***)
- Programs/groups for vulnerable populations, or those deemed non-essential may be cancelled or postponed.
- Remote work with clients/partners/colleagues will be encouraged where possible and appropriate
 - Online meetings may be arranged through administrative staff, as well as training on platforms such as zoom
- Management and the Communications Coordinator must be notified if any programs are postponed or closed.

Cancelling or Postponing Gatherings, Events and Trips

- At NYCH, any non-essential gatherings, events or trips which are specifically for the most vulnerable (seniors, those with compromised immunity, or respiratory illness), or where participants are not pre-registered, should be cancelled, or postponed until COVID-19 is deemed to no longer be a concern.
- Staff will check with their supervisor if unsure about cancelling or postponing an event.
- Management and the Communications Coordinator must be notified if any programs are postponed or closed.
- If events go forward as planned, participants will be screened prior to and upon arrival at the event and instructed to practice prevention/hygiene as described above.

1:1 and Other Meetings

- Everyone at NYCH will continue to use screening and precautionary measures for in person 1:1 meetings. Where possible or preferred, 1:1 meetings should be held by phone/what's app.
- Internal staff meetings can go ahead in person if precautions are observed – online options will also be provided where possible for those who cannot attend in person.

- Food may not be served or shared at internal NYCH meetings until further notice.
- External network, committee or community meetings should be held online. If this is not possible, check with your supervisor.

Communication to Clients and Community

- A list of messages is available to use when communicating with clients and community members. Please notify management or the Communications Coordinator if other messages/language is required.
- NYCH has distributed resources from public health for your information, as well as information in Farsi and Chinese for you to share with clients and participants. Resources can be found on the 'department' drive, in the 'joint health & safety' folder, 'coronavirus resources' file. Check the TPH website below for other resources.

<https://www.toronto.ca/community-people/health-wellness-care/diseases-medications-vaccines/coronavirus/>

Employee Travel

- In accordance with Canadian public health directives, all NYCH employees are required to self-isolate for 14 days after any travel outside Canada until further notice.
- Everyone at NYCH is encouraged to monitor Toronto Public Health and the **Public Health Agency of Canada's travel advisories** for the most current information, as these are changing regularly.
- Managers will work with each person who is impacted by this on an individual basis to determine what work can be done from home, hours of work and time off. Please notify your supervisor of your travel plans before you leave, and contact them when you return to make these arrangements.

PROCEDURES: SITE CLOSURES/WORKING REMOTELY

All NYCH employees and volunteers should understand the philosophy of our organization's leadership during a time of crisis, such as dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic, where we are required to close our sites and work remotely. Here are our core beliefs:

- We know our team is made up of experienced and dedicated individuals – we are here to provide support and direction, but trust everyone to work independently.
- We recognize that everyone tends to go 'above and beyond' at times like this. However, everyone also deals with personal stress, as well as increased demands and anxiety among the people they serve. The physical, mental and emotional fatigue that can result is normal under such conditions. It's ok to feel these effects – all of us will at some point.
- It is critical that we take care of ourselves (and help each other to do so) so that we can get through this together and help our communities to do the same.
- Many of us are planning to use comp and vacation time when restrictions are lifted, but it is important to also use this time when we need a break. Especially at a time when there is so much more pressure in every aspect of our lives, we need to step away from our work to rest and recharge.

- We will do our best to support our entire NYCH team during this time, but we know we're not going to get everything right all the time. We are committed to changing and improving as quickly as we can, and with everyone's help, to learning from our experiences, successes, and struggles.

Please note: All NYCH policies still apply while we are working from home in order to protect employees, volunteers, clients and community members, even if they are not highlighted here. Policies can be found on mangoapps in NYCH Info/ Human Resources/HR Policies section.

Employee Work/Responsibilities

- Every effort will be made to provide our regular programs and services during site closures, however some adjustments will need to be made that impact our typical ways of working.
- Communicate with your supervisor regularly to ensure you are clear around goals, priorities, and timelines as they may change during this time.
- Everyone is encouraged to work with their supervisor and colleagues to learn and explore new ways of doing their work that help us to better serve the community.
- The management team will do our best to provide everyone with the tools and technology they need to do their work, however, we will all need to be patient as we make these changes.
- For those employees whose roles make it difficult to work from home, your supervisor will discuss alternate types of work that may require you to perform different duties or work with different teams. There may be opportunities to provide support to those more isolated members of the community. You will be notified in advance, and provided with support in making these changes.

Hours and Response Time During Closures

When working from home, it's easy for us to lose sight of hours. Regardless of personal circumstances, it can be easy to work long hours and sometimes go without breaks. It can also be challenging to juggle priorities and meet urgent requests.

Please use the following points in managing your schedule and hours while working remotely:

- Most of us will require some flexibility in our schedule – please discuss this with your supervisor to determine the best way to manage hours and workload.
- Regardless of your schedule, track daily hours as you would normally – the total number of hours worked every day, as well as the number of vacation, comp, or sick hours used, if applicable.
- Establish a routine with consistent hours, as much as possible, to track and manage workload
- It is expected that staff are accessible by email or phone during working hours as usual. There may be occasional exceptions, but you are not expected to be available or to respond to messages when you are off work. If you are taking vacation, comp or sick time, it is helpful to notify your team, in addition to your supervisor.
- Use alerts (on phone, from family members, etc.) to remind you to get up and stretch, eat, go out and get some air, etc.
- Establish boundaries with clients – (e.g. use an automated message letting them know your standard work hours and expected time frame for responses; set the length of 1:1 meetings and encourage clients to send information by email prior to meetings if appropriate to save time)

- All NYCH employees have access to various types of leave (family medical, family caregiver, personal emergency leave, and Infectious Disease Emergency leave, or any new leaves introduced by the ESA specifically related to COVID -19), which may be compensated through EI. If any employee is concerned about missing work due to lost income, please talk to the Director of Talent and Culture or the Program Director.

Health and Safety

- Everyone’s home is now also their workplace, and NYCH’s policies still apply regarding health and safety – we are required to take whatever precautions we can to create a healthy and safe workspace, and must report to HR if we experience any work-related injury after treating or seeking treatment if required.
- NYCH is not responsible and assumes no liability for any injuries to family members, visitors, and others in any employee’s home.
- If at any point you feel your health and safety are at risk from working at home, please call 911 inform your supervisor or Director of Talent and Culture as soon as possible.
- When working from home, every effort should be made to create the healthiest work space possible, including a surface big enough for work materials and equipment, the most comfortable chair, best lighting and ventilation available.
- Floors should be free of slip/trip/fall hazards, and power cords should be safely secured and out of the way.
- Where employees are provided with equipment while working from home, NYCH will assume the responsibility for normal maintenance and repair of that equipment subject to appropriate use. NYCH will not be responsible for any costs that are associated with using the home as an alternative workplace, such as home maintenance, insurance, internet or telephone connection, or utilities.

Isolation and Mental Health

- Keeping physical distance, or ‘social distancing’ has been identified as a key strategy to combat the spread of COVID-19. While it is important to take whatever steps we can in this effort, we know the impact of continued isolation on our clients, communities, ourselves, and our families can be significant. We encourage you to continue to reach out to your clients and participants, volunteers, and those in the community who may not be sick, but are isolated.
- All NYCH employees except for supply staff are able to use the Employee and Family Assistance Plan (see files in the ‘Health & Wellness’ group on mangoapps for more information about NYCH’s EFAP). This plan provides short term counseling on a number of stress-related and mental health issues, but also around financial and legal issues. Those eligible for the extended health benefits plan also have an annual therapy benefit. These resources are here for your support – don’t hesitate to use them whenever you need to.
- Please let your supervisor or someone in senior management know if you’re really struggling and need more support.
- The following article may be helpful – please share others you find:

<https://afsp.org/taking-care-of-your-mental-health-in-the-face-of-uncertainty/?fbclid=IwAR3VhV5FKEpmH03--vY7gXyDE3M9g01qdHJii4-Qv7M2Z9JTJOVagex64vI>



Anti-Discrimination and Harassment

- Crisis situations such as the current pandemic tend to exacerbate inequities that already exist. More than ever, we must strive to build awareness and address any situations of discrimination and harassment, and to provide services that support vulnerable, oppressed and high needs community members in an inclusive and respectful manner
- It is important to remember that even when working online or by phone, our standards of conduct apply to employees, volunteers, clients and community members. As outlined in detail in NYCH's policy, it is expected that all behaviour is respectful of all aspects of individuals' identity, and free of discrimination or harassment.

Privacy and Security

- If you work with confidential information at home, you need to ensure that you follow required steps to protect this material and reduce the risk of loss to NYCH. Please refer to the 'Working from Home' guide, which outlines best practices for using technology and online platforms, or contact the Manager of Operations for guidance.

REFERENCES and POLICIES

NYCH

- Leaves of Absence
- Health and Safety
- Risk Management
- Vacation
- Salaries and Payroll
- Anti-Discrimination/Anti-Harassment
- All other NYCH policies

Other

- Human Rights Code
- Ontario Employment Standards Act 2000
- Occupational Health and Safety Act Ontario