



COVID-19 and Student Housing

The life of a student is complicated and unique. We know that many of our students are living in off-campus housing. We recognize that this is a large part of the student experience, and we want to offer some tips and considerations on how to stay safe while living in off-campus housing during a pandemic.

Over the past year and a half, we have spoken to many students who have been impacted by COVID-19 while living in student housing.

Keep Up to Date

As time goes on, we learn more about COVID-19, and as a result, Public Health adjusts guidelines accordingly, and we fluctuate our practices. It's important to get up-to-date information from our local Public Health officials. If there is an emergency, keep your emergency contacts in a shared space so that your housemates have easy access to this information, if needed.

Be Prepared

To go along with the above, it is helpful to be considerate of roommates who may have an increased risk for illness. If you are able to, discuss options on what to do if someone in your household were to get sick.

Some questions to consider:

- Is there a separate bathroom that someone who is ill can use?
- If someone does get sick, are roommates okay with the possibility of preparing meals for them?

It is also important to:

- Wash your hands with soap and water frequently (guidelines suggest for 20 seconds but you can also sing the "Happy Birthday" song). Video for hand hygiene
- Have hand sanitizer at the door so that, as you come into the home, you are able to clean your hands. Rub your hands until your hands are dry. Make sure you get sanitizer on all surfaces of your hands. Video for hand sanitizing
- Be open and honest with your roommates about any symptoms you may be experiencing.
- Stay home if you are sick.
- Cover your sneeze or cough with a tissue and dispose of the tissue into the garbage. Immediately wash your hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub.
- Clean 'high-touch' surfaces on a regular basis (doorknobs, light switches, taps, door handles, countertops). These surfaces can also include money/cash, doorknobs, handrails, elevator buttons, light switches, cabinet handles, faucet handles, tables, countertops and electronics. In child and youth settings, such surfaces may also include toys and play/sports equipment.
- Wear a mask or face shield when in public.

Cleaning Tips

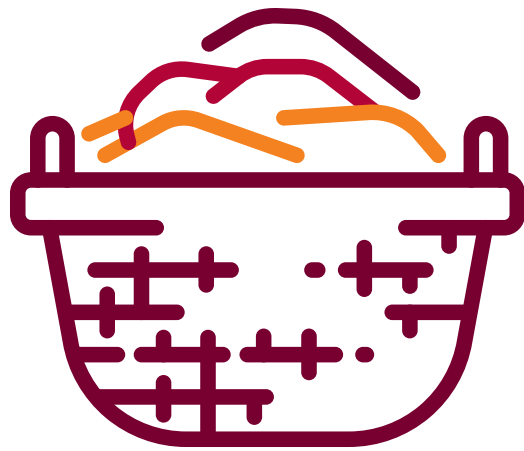
- Cleaning your house and hands is one of the best defences when it comes to preventing any sickness.
- Clean high-touch areas each day, and after you have a guest in your home.
- Clean other surfaces in the home when they are visibly dirty, or as needed. It's always a good idea to clean more frequently after having a guest in the home.
- Always follow the directions on the label of your cleaning products, check the expiry date of products that you use and check to see if the product has a disinfecting agent in the ingredients.
- Wear gloves when cleaning and ensure proper ventilation while using a disinfectant.

When cleaning when a roommate is sick:

- If the sick person is able to clean, make sure to provide them with their own supplies (paper towels, toilet paper, cleaners). The sick person should clean all surfaces and items after each use in shared spaces.
- If the person who is sick is not able to clean, the sick person should wear a mask and gloves before entering shared rooms.
- When the person who is sick has finished their isolation period, they should still wear a mask when entering a room. If you are able to, wait 24 hours to clean the areas that the sick person used (bedroom or bathroom).
- After eating, wear gloves when handling dishes/utensils for the person who is sick. If you can, use the dishwasher to clean their dishes. If you do not have a dishwasher, using hot water and soap is a good alternative. Make sure you wash your hands after handling their dishes.
- Use a dedicated garbage bin when handling the sick person's garbage and wash your hands after handling their garbage.
- Always store cleaning products as directed on the label.

For soft surfaces (rugs, carpets, drapes)

Clean the surfaces with soap & water or with designated cleaners for these surfaces.



Laundry

- For laundry, use warm water and make sure to dry items completely. You can also use vinegar for dual purpose: fabric softener and disinfectant.
- If handling laundry for someone who is sick, wear gloves and a mask. Handle the linens of the sick individual gently. Don't shake the dirty laundry. You should also place the laundry of the sick individual in a disposable plastic bag.
- Clean laundry hampers or baskets. Wash your hands after handling dirty laundry.
- Wear a mask in shared laundry areas.
- Wash your hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer after touching surfaces such as washing machines and dryers.
- Limit your time in shared laundry space. Sort and fold laundered items in your room.

Communal Living

Student life tends to be busy with being on campus, working on projects, working and making time to be social. We always encourage students to follow Public Health guidelines when it comes to maintaining social distances and limiting guests/friends who students allow into their home. It's okay to talk to your roommates about your comfort levels with having visitors in your home. We suggest:

- Are all housemates okay with having friends in the home? If you are going to have friends over:
- Do you want your friends to wear a mask inside? Are you going to ask your friend to wash/sanitize their hands when they come in?

Difficult Conversations

Washing our hands and wearing a mask is the simple thing that we can do to protect ourselves and others. But what about navigating boundaries with our housemates?

A global pandemic has been described as being 'unprecedented' and 'difficult.' When we factor in moving to a city and potentially living with strangers, our emotions become exasperated. The first thing to remember when going into how to navigate boundaries in student housing when it comes to protecting yourself and others from Covid, is respect and empathy. Everyone wants to feel like they are being heard and listened to (two very different concepts).

Start by talking about comfort levels (are you okay with guests being over? If you have guests over, are you okay with cleaning and sanitizing after they leave? Will you all wear masks inside?). Go into these conversations with an open mind. It is completely normal for people to have complicated and conflicted feelings about the pandemic. Try to understand what is important to your housemates, as well as what they may need and how this impacts their behaviours. Try your best to avoid making assumptions about why someone is resistant to following rules. Take their perspective into account.

Once you have established everyone's comfort levels, it's okay to move onto the 'bigger' discussions, such as preparing for what can be done if one roommate falls ill. During these discussions, you can always use 'I Statements.' This is when we communicate how something makes us feel in a non-confrontational way. The basic layout is to say "I feel (emotion) when...". These statements are based solely on how you feel and are not meant to hurt or upset your housemates. Try to listen to what everyone is saying. There are many distractions that can impact your ability to listen. Be aware of your own feelings and try to not project or push your feelings onto others. In doing so, you can create a neutral environment.

Other effective communication skills are:

Mindfulness: A global pandemic is a heavy topic that can bring up a lot of feelings and the potential for conflict. Learn how to notice and manage your emotions so that the situation does not escalate. Be mindful of your tone. (It's not always what we say, but how we say it.) You should check in with yourself during these conversations and ask yourself, "is this a conversation, or is this an argument?"

Open-ended questions: These are questions that cannot be answered with a 'yes' or 'no' response. These types of questions bring our thoughts, feelings or ideas. You can use these questions to gain a better understanding. Try to refrain from asking too many open-ended questions, as it could make someone feel like they're being interrogated.

We are not always going to agree with one another, but by using affirmations, you are validating someone's feelings by being empathetic. An example of this is "It's hard not seeing your friends, especially with everything that's going on."

Reflections are when we listen to what someone has said and say it back to the person. An example of this is if your housemate says "I'm bored being at home all the time and just want to get together with my friends for some drinks." You can respond, "You've been doing your part by staying home but you still want to connect with your friends." We have all in some manner, lost control of our social lives. This is stressful. By listening and reflecting in this scenario, you can offer your housemate an alternative, such as having a few friends over in the backyard.

Wrap up the conversation by highlighting some key points that have been discussed. These types of discussions may last awhile, or may be done in small spurts. Summarize what was discussed and decided on.

This is just a brief overview of what can be done to help you and your housemates. We recognize that these are tough conversations to have, and Student Wellness Centre is here to support. Don't hesitate to reach out!

For more information contact us at the Campus Health and Wellness Centre
studentwellness@moahwkcollege.ca or call 905-575-2211

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