



Commonwealth of Massachusetts
**DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING &
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

Charles D. Baker, Governor ♦ Karyn E. Polito, Lt. Governor ♦ Jennifer D. Maddox, Undersecretary

PHN 2020-11

To: All Local Housing Authorities

From: Ben Stone, Associate Director, Division of Public Housing

Re: Guidance and Best Practices for Housing Authorities during COVID-19 Emergency

Date: March 20, 2020

Table of Contents

- 1. General COVID-19 Information**
- 2. DHCD Deadlines and Oversight Relief**
- 3. Maintenance Operations**
- 4. Office Operations**
- 5. Signage and Visitors**
- 6. Tenant Selection and Lease-ups**
- 7. Human Resources**
- 8. Community Rooms and Events**
- 9. Resident Services**
- 10. What Happens if a Resident is Infected?**
- 11. Communications to Residents**

The rapidly evolving COVID-19 (coronavirus) situation presents many challenges to Local Housing Authorities (LHAs). DHCD has been working closely with LHAs, Department of Public Health (DPH), Executive Office of Elder Affairs (EOEA), and Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development (EOHED) in order to share the most up to date best practices and information with LHAs. We appreciate that LHAs are on the front-lines of this situation, and we applaud your hard work and ingenuity serving some of the most vulnerable residents of the Commonwealth.

This Public Housing Notice (PHN) provides a list of best practices, recommended LHA actions, and amended DHCD guidance regarding LHA operations during the COVID-19 response. While we know many LHAs have already instituted many of these practices, this Notice document serves as a template and resource for Authorities during this period. This follows up on our [initial guidance on March 10 \(PHN 2020-07\)](#) that provided high-level information and hygiene recommendations, and includes more actionable items for Housing Authorities. It also follows Governor Baker's [declaration of a state of](#)

[emergency](#) on March 10 and we hope helps LHAs to prepare themselves and their residents for an extended period where normal functions are disrupted.

Note that this document does not contain detailed information on LHA finances, evictions, or guidance on use of personally identifiable information (PII) while working remotely. We understand that these are important issues to LHAs and are working on developing reasonable guidance for these important issues. See [PHN 2010-10](#) for guidance on capital projects. Thank you for your patience.

1. General Information

For general information on the COVID-19 outbreak, please refer to the frequently updated webpages from DPH and the Center on Disease Control (CDC). The DPH website includes guidance issued by other state agencies such as Elder Affairs that may also be relevant for Housing Authorities and residents. The Citizens' Housing and Planning Association (CHAPA) has a selection of resources for affordable and public housing managers.

- mass.gov/covid19
- <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>
 - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/prevention.html>
- <https://www.chapa.org/housing-news/covid-19-affordable-housing-updates>

In addition to the measures recommended below LHAs **should be working closely** with their local board of health, emergency services, and municipality to contingency plan for possible cases of COVID-19 in their development and/or the extension of social distancing measures for an indefinite period of at least several weeks.

2. DHCD Deadlines and Oversight Relief

DHCD understands that both LHA and DHCD staff need to focus on the response to COVID-19, including adjusting business practices to minimize personal interactions, communicating with residents, and coordinating with local partners. DHCD has already put off several deadlines (see [PHN 2020-08](#) and addendum), and will review other deadlines or reporting requirements that will impact LHAs over next 30 days. At the same time, given the indefinite length of the emergency, business that can be conducted remotely will be continued *as far as practicable*.

PMR ratings will be adjusted to reflect the changes to reporting timelines, maintenance practices, and other business as affected by COVID-19. **At this time**, DHCD plans to continue doing PMR desk audits remotely, but none will be scheduled until at least April 15, and we will reevaluate PMR deadlines at that time

3. Maintenance Operations

With the onset of COVID-19, local housing authorities should adjust their maintenance delivery systems in order to decrease the spread of the coronavirus via person-to-person contact, while maintaining safe, decent affordable housing. Therefore, maintenance staff should only enter occupied units to address

emergency health and safety issues and health screening questions should be asked of residents prior to staff entering (Details are outlined, below.) Maintenance staff should take precautions when entering all units, including minimizing time in unit, asking resident to remain at least 6 feet away from staff, and wearing PPE if supplies permit. LHAs should also temporarily make the following changes to their maintenance operations.

- a. **Emergency Health and Safety Repairs:** LHAs **MUST** continue to service emergency work orders using proper precautions. Emergencies should be narrowly defined as only those conditions which are immediately threatening to the life or safety of residents, staff, or structures. If a deficiency meets this definition any time of day, it needs to be identified as an emergency. The definition is as follows:

Maintenance emergency – **A condition that is immediately threatening to the life and safety of residents, staff, or structures.** (See [Property Maintenance Guide](#) (PMG) page 1--10). Below is the minimum list of emergencies that should be called out to maintenance for immediate repair:

- Fires of any kind (Call 911)
- Gas leaks or Gas odor (Call 911)
- Electric power failures
- Electrical hazards, sparking outlets
- Broken water pipes or flooding
- No water or unsafe water
- Sewer or toilet blockage
- Roof leaks
- Lock outs
- Door or Window lock failure
- No heat
- No Hot water
- Snow or ice storm
- Dangerous structural conditions
- Inoperable Smoke or CO detectors, beeping or chirping detectors
- Elevator stoppage or entrapment

- b. **Annual Unit Inspections:** *Postpone* all routine and annual unit inspections throughout the duration of the emergency. This includes annual inspections of occupied units normally conducted throughout the fiscal year. DHCD will adjust PMR ratings for the inspections criteria, including timeliness, as not to penalize LHAs. DHCD will take into account LHA's response to the COVID-19 emergency. LHA's should document deferred inspection schedules with COVID-19.

- c. **Building & Safety System Inspections:** The inspection of building and safety systems *should* continue. This includes the quarterly/annual inspections of fire safety systems, emergency lighting, boilers, elevators, etc.

- d. **Deferred/Non-Emergency Tenant requested Work Orders:** Maintenance repairs for in-unit non-emergency items, like the repair of a bathroom soap dish, or the deferred maintenance item of painting the bedroom door, should be *postponed* during the COVID-19 outbreak to avoid person to person contact and the spread of the coronavirus. DHCD will adjust PMR ratings, including timeliness, for Deferred/Non-Emergency Tenant Requested, work orders. LHA will not be penalized. LHA's should document deferred inspection schedules with COVID-19.

- e. **Cleaning and Sanitizing:** LHAs *should* frequently clean and sanitize touchpoints in common areas. (i.e., doors, handrails, bathroom surfaces and handles, counters, fridge handles, etc.). LHAs should feel free to use additional staff time (if available). To avoid all maintenance staff being quarantined or sick at the same time, consider rotating staff IF you have sufficient maintenance staff.
- f. **Alternate Maintenance Work:** If maintenance staff have additional time due to deferring all routine, in-unit work orders, LHAs *may* repurpose them towards exterior or site work that can be done without any interaction with resident occupied space. This can include painting, landscaping, vacant unit turnovers, and paving & sidewalk repair. If the work involves an improvement to building or site that will last at least 5 years, it may be eligible for capital funding as a force account project; please reach out to your DHCD Project Manager.
- g. **COVID-19 Safety Guidance:** LHAs should ask but can't require residents to let maintenance know if they are experiencing symptoms of the Coronavirus. LHAs should use the same process for assessing the risk of exposure for all residents, by implementing the use of the attached questionnaires:

Attachment A: COVID-19 Coronavirus Questionnaire (from Worcester HA)

Attachment B: COVID-19 Questionnaires Maintenance Instructions

For resident and maintenance safety, precautions should be taken in every unit that is being entered. Staff should use proper precautions. When maintenance staff **MUST** enter a unit for EMERGENCY repairs, the following precautions should be taken:

- Treat each unit as if it is an isolated positive case, and follow CDC social distancing and hygiene protocols at all times.
- Use Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), if available, disposable gloves at a minimum.
- Keep **at least** 6-8 feet of space from other persons in unit.
- Wash hands thoroughly before and after entering unit.
- Keep time in the unit as short as possible without compromising the required emergency repairs.
- LHAs should seek to purchase Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for maintenance staff entering units.
- When emergency repairs are required in a unit with an isolated positive case, LHA's may consider a hazardous duty hourly pay premium under union applicable contracts pay for maintenance workers that need that service that unit.

4. Office Operations

While it is important to practice social distancing at this time, LHAs have an important role to play during this crisis. The shelter system for homeless individuals and families is even more vulnerable to the risks of COVID-19 than public housing, so it is critical that LHAs continue to meet their core mission of providing safe and affordable housing for low-income people of the Commonwealth. Residents and applicants need LHAs more than ever during this challenging time.

- a. **Office Hours:** LHAs may choose to shorten or limit weekly office hours and should take steps to severely limit person to person contact. If offices remain open to public, LHAs should strongly encourage any residents or applicants to make appointments to limit crowding and lines at offices. LHA staff **must** remain available to tenants and applicants by phone and email throughout the authority's regular business hours, even if LHA closes its office to public. This may require the LHA to set up call-forwarding services to staff cell-phones.
- b. **Telework for Office Staff:** Office staff who do not need to interact directly with residents or applicants should continue work from home as far as possible. In general, the minimum number of staff to maintain the developments, interact with tenants, and supervise staff should be on site, and while onsite they should maintain social distancing, avoiding meetings and remaining more than six feet apart. . LHAs should stagger work times for staff that need to be in the office to reduce crowding and should hold all meetings through tele/video-conference.

We understand that many LHAs, like the Commonwealth, were not fully set up for remote working at the start of this pandemic. IF they have not already, LHAs should avail themselves of the \$5,000 technology budget exemption in the [FY20 budget guidelines](#) (p.3), and if they do not have sufficient resources to acquire *necessary* technology for remote work should reach out to their HMS.

DHCD is aware of questions about staff bringing tenant & applicant personal data home with them or transmitting by email; DHCD will work with our legal staff to develop further guidance on this important topic.

- c. **Communication:** Following the guidance of social distancing, telephone, fax, and email are the preferred modes of communicating with tenants, applicants, and staff. Most appointments should be performed via telephone instead of in-person. LHAs should also install drop boxes for paperwork that must be physically transmitted (such as paper applications and verifications). These could be out at developments or outside the offices.
- d. **Applicants:** LHAs cannot turn away applicants who come on site. However, staff should strongly encourage people to apply online (at kiosks, if available), or to use the drop box for transmission.
- e. **Lease ups:** DHCD understands the concerns with continuing lease ups, both due to staff capacity and fear of contagion. It is vitally important, however, that LHAs continue leasing up units *as far as possible* to vulnerable households who, in absence of securing permanent affordable housing, will be left even further exposed and compromised during this crisis. Lease ups should be administered with consideration for social distancing and the safety of applicants and staff, as outlined in section 7 below.

5. Signage and Visitors

Many residents will be relying on family, friends, and service providers to help them through this challenging time. It will be important for property managers to monitor, to the best of their ability, visitation.

- a. **Limiting or Restricting Visitors:** LHAs are encouraged to limit or restrict non-essential visitors if critical for resident health, and should at least discourage them through visitor signage. LHAs are encouraged to restrict access to common areas such as community rooms and lobbies. LHAs are also encouraged to work with their local board of health to discuss an order to restrict visitors to c.667 (elderly/disabled) developments. In all circumstances, LHAs **must** ensure that critical nutritional and medical services **continue** for residents, and cannot lock all doors.
- b. **Signage:** DHCD recommends putting up visible signage that encourages proper handwashing and discourages unnecessary visitors, especially those who are showing cold or flu-like symptoms. LHAs should endeavor to translate signage into different languages, as appropriate to your residents.
- c. **Handwashing and Sanitizer Stations:** While supplies are difficult to secure, install handwashing stations and/or sanitizer stations at common lobbies that serve multiple housing units.
- d. **Scheduled Visitors:** As noted in section 9 below, LHAs should have (and generally have) canceled all scheduled events. While some non-LHA staff will still have to continue visiting to provide critical nutritional, medical, and personal care services, especially in senior housing, LHAs should ensure all visitors are educated on proper hygiene and social distancing practices and signing into visitors logs. LHAs should discourage other service providers from physically visiting developments, directing them towards remote communications with residents. LHAs should also discourage, as far as possible, group transportation for residents to locations other than grocery stores, pharmacies, and medical appointments to avoid opportunities for transmission.
- e. **Visitor Log:** At common lobbies, or in office, LHAs should create a log system that will enable future contact tracing through DPH, in the event a resident, staff or visitor tests positive for COVID-19. This may only be possible in high-rise developments, and we understand that with skeleton staffing any logging will likely be voluntary. LHAs should also encourage residents to log their visitors. See Attachment C: **COVID-19 Visitor Log &** Attachment D: **COVID-19 Visitor Stop Sign.**

6. Tenant Selections and Lease Ups

DHCD has heard LHA concerns about continuing lease ups with limited staff capacity while maintaining safe social distancing practices. While we understand these concerns, we recommend that leasing activity continue *as far as practicable* as LHAs stabilize operations for the COVID-19 emergency; the public housing units are a critical resource for the extremely low-income population. We understand that the pace of tenant selection may slow, but we also encourage LHAs to be somewhat more lenient on paperwork and verification than typical. The below guidelines are meant to help LHAs safely continuing leasing activity without additional health risk for staff, residents, and applicants. In general, LHAs should avoid any close, in-person interaction with applicants.

- a. **Encourage online applications:** Post a notice outside the office that applicants should apply on-line at www.applyforpublichousing.com. Include information that applicants can apply using a computer, tablet, or smart phone. LHA should post their phone number for applicants that need help completing the application. Every effort should be made to provide the applicant with assistance over the phone. If the applicant cannot complete the application online, they should be sent a paper copy of the application.
- b. **Paper applications:** Paper applications can still be mailed to or dropped off at the housing authority office.
 - Place copies of paper CHAMP applications in an easily accessible place outside the office for applicant pick-up.
 - Provide an easily accessible drop-off box for applicants to drop off applications.
 - Continue to process applications received. Timestamp the application and enter it into CHAMP. Ensure that staff are washing hands before and after handling all incoming and outgoing mail. We understand that this practice, remote work, and skeleton staffs will lead to slower application processing.
- c. **Email communication:** Communication via email with applicants who have provided an email address is acceptable and recommended during this time. LHAs must maintain electronic copies of email sent to applicants. If an applicant has not provided an email, the authority must continue sending paper mail.
- d. **Email verification:** LHAs can accept attachments to an email as verification of information needed to make determinations of eligibility and qualification from an applicant. LHAs should exercise reasonableness when requesting and reviewing documentation. It may be difficult for an applicant to obtain a particular document at this time.
- e. **Telephone verification:** Verification can be done by telephone. Any information taken over the telephone should be recorded in the applicant file including LHA staff member, person's name who is providing information, information provided and date.
- f. **Appeals for ineligibility/disqualification:** Applicants found ineligible/disqualified must be sent the letter informing the applicant that they have been removed from the waiting list and they have the right to request a private conference/appeal.
 - Private conferences and appeals can be conducted on the phone: the phone call should be recorded, and any documentation the applicant wants to be considered should either be emailed or mailed. LHAs may also set up a drop box for appeal documentation.
 - Applicants still have the right to seek an in-person hearing, but LHAs should postpone said hearing until after state of emergency has ended.
- g. **Offers of housing:** Housing offers, acceptance, and rejection of offers can be made via telephone and email. Local notes should be made in CHAMP and these dates should be recorded in CHAMP offer stage workflow. Record this information in the vacancy system.

- Units can be shown following CDC protocol of remaining at least 6 feet away from applicants and washing hands before and after interaction.
- If you need to meet with anyone, you may ask if the person has a fever/a cough. If this is the case, you should designate the applicant as Good Cause Delay until their symptoms have resolved. You should recommend that the applicant call the state COVID-19 hotline 2-1-1 immediately.
- Paper work for income verification, determination of rent, and lease execution can be done by phone, email or mail.
- Keys can be issued following CDC protocols.
- If an applicant refuses a unit after having viewed it, the LHA must sanitize the unit before offering/showing the unit again.

7. Human Resources

The bullet points below summarize some attempts to answer frequently asked questions during this coronavirus health emergency. There is no legal precedent and the situation is fluid, so please use good judgment, and please work with your regional attorney or other counsel on employment related matters. You may contact Sarah O’Leary (sarah.oleary@mass.gov) with any questions about employment actions that could lead to litigation. She will be happy to refer you to legal and human resources specialists.

a. Employment Health Care:

- Employees should NOT work if they are ill. Per DPH, Employees exhibiting symptoms of illness (fever, cough, difficulty breathing) **should be sent home** immediately and should contact their healthcare provider. Staff should not return to work until they are free of fever, signs of a fever, and any other symptoms for at least 24 hours, without use of fever-reducing or other symptom altering medicines (e.g. cough suppressants). If an employee is diagnosed with COVID-19 they cannot return to work until they have been authorized to leave their home by their local board of health.
- Employers may do health screenings for staff, including temperature checks, but must do so in a well-documented, impartial, and non-invasive manner.

b. **Contingency Planning:** LHAs may lose significant amount of staff time to sickness, quarantine, and caring for family during this period. They should plan for loss of staff, with potential contingencies including mutual aid with other housing authorities, collaboration with local governments, and creation of a list of local contractors who can respond to emergency service calls if maintenance staff is not available.

c. **Sick Time and Paid Leave:** An LHA’s requirement to provide paid leave to employees quarantined or suffering from Coronavirus will vary, depending upon any contract, collective bargaining agreement, salaried exempt status, the employer’s personnel policy, and paid leave time accrued by the employee. **This is a very sensitive area** – please contact Sarah O’Leary (sarah.oleary@mass.gov) and/or your regional attorney or other counsel with compensation related matters.

d. Responsibility of Certain Staff to Continue Working

- LHAs should communicate to employees whether they are essential or non-essential employees in writing. Most LHA employees, especially maintenance staff, may be deemed essential as they provide core functions, such as a safe and sanitary living space, to residents.
- If an employee is determined to be essential for the continued operation of the housing authority, they are required to report to work, unless they have leave time available or have sought a medical accommodation.
- If an employee so designated as essential refuses to report for duty they may be subject to discipline up to and including discharge. Circumstances will vary widely by employee, and DHCD strongly recommends that LHAs contact an employment attorney before taking adverse action.

8. Community Spaces, Events, and Meetings

Community spaces and events are prime vectors for transmission of COVID-19. Governor Baker has [prohibited gatherings of 25 or more as of March 15](#), and as of March 16 the Federal Coronavirus task force issued guidelines recommending no [gatherings in excess of 10 people](#). Developments housing vulnerable populations such as the elderly should adhere to the guidelines even more rigorously. Housing Authorities, however, have to balance the need for certain critical services to continue. Therefore, DHCD recommends that:

- LHAs cancel **ALL** scheduled events in community rooms. They can consider closing community rooms, but must allow continued access to laundry facilities. If leaving the community room open, LHA should post prominent signage discouraging residents from using in groups larger than two or for extended periods of time. LHA communications to residents should discourage informal gatherings of any kind, and provide appropriate social distancing recommendations. Open community rooms should be disinfected at least **twice daily**. If residents do not adhere to these guidelines, LHAs can consider closing community rooms that do not have laundry facilities.
- When canceling scheduled events, LHAs should **coordinate** with any affected service providers to ensure that critical resident services continue. In particular, food services such as food pantries or congregate meals for seniors **need to continue**, but in a safe manner that reduces the risk of virus transmission. This can include visits to a food pantry by appointment to avoid crowding as well as providing meals to seniors in takeout containers to be consumed within their units.
- LHA business involving public and semi-public meetings should be **postponed** for the duration of the state of emergency or **moved to a video or teleconference platform**. This includes grievance panel hearings and Local Tenant Organization meetings. If a resident requests an in-person hearing after video or teleconference is offered, LHA must offer this but after the state of emergency has ended.
- Board Meetings should continue in order to conduct LHA business. Pursuant to the Governor's [Executive Order on March 12](#), however, these meetings should be virtual. There no longer needs to

be an in-person quorum, but the meeting must take place through a teleconference, video meeting, or other medium that allows for transparency and public access.

9. Resident Services

Resident Service Coordinators (RSC) will be focusing on ensuring the health and safety of residents and figuring out how to do so remotely. Maintaining existing relationships with local service providers and networks will be the best way to know what the available options are locally. Two top priorities are ensuring ongoing food security for residents and to the degree possible decreasing social isolation.

The outreach on food security should be done to all residents, residents who were not food insecure before may now become so. To the degree that your LHA already has relationships in place for food distribution, work with your local department of health to determine safe food practices. Many school systems are continuing to offer food to those who were on free or reduced breakfast/lunch with both pick-up and delivery options. Project Bread has set up a statewide resource for finding local food sources that an RSC can work with and can be given out to residents for them to call directly.

Project Bread: Hunger and Food Resources During COVID-19

<http://www.projectbread.org/news-and-events/news/covid-19-hunger-food.html>

Food Hotline: 1-800-645-8333

Monday- Friday: 8am - 7pm

Saturday: 10am - 2pm

Counselors can assist callers in 160 languages and there is a dedicated line to assist the hearing-impaired at TTY: 1-800-377-1292

LHAs and their RSCs should also continue to work with current food providers, including food pantries, congregate meals, and meals on wheels, to ensure that these vital nutritional supports can continue in a manner that maintains social distancing practices.

While we are all practicing social distancing, it is essential to maintain other kinds of contact with residents. This can include daily or weekly calls, setting up video conference calls, and texts. Reaching out by phone or text to every household will provide needed support and an opportunity for residents, particularly those living alone or who are elderly, to talk with another person. This will also provide the RSC with a sense of what other needs may need to be addressed.

The Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts just created Network of Care, a new online resource for finding behavioral health and social services across the state. This could be a useful resource as RSCs try to connect residents to remote behavioral health services.

<https://massachusetts.networkofcare.org/mh/index.aspx>

DHCD will work with LHAs recently awarded funding to expand hours for or hire a RSC to quickly disburse the funds and increase RSC support.

10. What Happens if a Resident is infected?

DHCD understands that LHAs are very concerned about the scenario, which sadly is likely to occur, of a COVID-19 case in a large development. The following are common-sense steps based on [DPH guidance](#) on Congregate care.

LHAs are encouraged to limit or restrict non-essential visitors if critical for resident health, and should at least discourage them through visitor signage. LHAs are encouraged to restrict access to common areas such as community rooms and lobbies. LHAs are encouraged to work with their local board of health to discuss an order to restrict visitors to c.667 (elderly/disabled) developments. In all circumstances LHAs must ensure that critical nutritional and medical services continue for residents, and cannot lock all doors.

- a. Raise awareness in residents and staff about how to practice social distancing and encourage them to report symptoms consistent with COVID-19 to their healthcare provider. Materials to assist with this are available on www.mass.gov/covid-19 and <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>.
- b. LHAs must allow residents who have tested positive for COVID-19 to return to their unit to recover if not hospitalized.
- c. For Questions about how to respond to information about a suspect or confirmed case of COVID-19, **contact your Local Board of Health** (LBOH) for guidance and support. Please also contact your DHCD Housing Management Specialist with the details (number of affected residents, development, etc) to help organize a response.
- d. When a case of COVID-19 is identified, the Local Board of Health will require that the resident self-isolate in their unit (unless they require hospitalization). Information about how to protect other household members is available here: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/steps-when-sick.html> and information about how the household members can help protect themselves is available here <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/guidance-prevent-spread.html#precautions>. If available, provide a facemask to resident to limit spread to household members.
- e. LHAs should work with their Local Board of Health to determine if any type of public notification is necessary. In most cases, the LBOH will work directly with the resident to identify close contacts (individuals who have been within 6 feet of the case for a prolonged period of time while the patient was symptomatic). Close contacts will be notified directly and put into quarantine by the Local Board of Health. Individuals NOT identified as close contacts are not considered to have been exposed.
- f. Maintenance staff should only enter the unit where a confirmed case is being isolated for **emergency** work orders, and should be equipped with appropriate PPE. They should follow strict hand hygiene (frequent hand washing or use of alcohol-based hand gels) and social distancing protocols when they do. If possible the resident should stay in a room separate from the room where the work is occurring, with the door closed.
- g. LHA should work with a resident service coordinator if available or local service providers to ensure that isolated resident is brought food and other essential items.

11. Communications to Residents

We all acknowledge that individuals and families living in public housing are vulnerable to the risks of COVID-19, so it is critical that LHAs continue to meet their core mission of providing safe and affordable housing for low-income people of the Commonwealth. Residents and applicants need LHAs more than ever during this challenging time. **Communication is key to helping to inform and protect residents.**

With that in mind, LHAs should make every attempt to communicate with their residents on a regular basis. More communication is better. LHAs should provide periodic updates, regarding local, state, and national news about the coronavirus and LHA operations. Please use your best efforts to translate all notices into languages used by your residents.

- Email
LHAs should prepare a group “resident email” list for all residents who have provided an email address to the LHA. LHAs should communicate by email to all residents, whenever possible.
- Robo-Calls
Many local towns and cities use an automated communication system, known as “Robo-Calls” to notify their residents in the event of an emergency. Please contact your local municipality to request the use of this system and/or to ensure that your residents are on your local municipality robo-call list. This is one example of a robo-call service: <https://telephonetownhallmeeting.com/robocalls/>

Important Information for LHAs to Communicate to Residents Regarding Resident Finances.

The COVID-19 pandemic presents huge financial challenges for residents. Please notify your tenants immediately, regarding the following items.

- **Rent Re-Determination** - We strongly recommend that LHAs are very lenient on downward rental redeterminations during the COVID-19 emergency. Tenants should be notified that they can adjust their rent quickly to reflect reduced income due to lost hours resulting from the COVID-19 response (see [PHN 2019-09](#) issued 3/13/20).
- **Unemployment Insurance Rules** – The Governor has signed legislation easing the application process for unemployment insurance. Please provide your residents with the following link regarding Unemployment Insurance Rules: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/massachusetts-covid-19-unemployment-information>
- See Attachment E: **Template Resident COVID-19 Notification**

Please contact your Housing Management Specialist, laura.taylor@mass.gov, or ben.stone@mass.gov with any questions.

Attachments

Attachment A: **COVID-19 Coronavirus Questionnaire (from Worcester HA)**

Attachment B: **COVID-19 Questionnaires Maintenance Instructions**

Attachment C: **COVID-19 Visitor Log**

Attachment D: **COVID-19 Visitor Stop Sign**

Attachment E: **Template Resident COVID-19 Notification**