COVID-19 is the illness caused by a new type of coronavirus. The illness is spread from person-to-person by getting exposed to droplets that have the virus in them, usually via coughing or sneezing. The main symptoms of COVID-19 include: fever, cough, difficulty breathing, and fatigue. These symptoms show up between 2 and 14 days after you’ve contracted the illness. People who are considered at increased risk include:

- those with underlying health conditions, such as heart disease, lung disease such as asthma/COPD, diabetes, or HIV
- people who are immunocompromised
- people over age 60

**What can people utilizing SSPs or harm reduction services do to protect themselves from COVID-19?**

There is currently no vaccine available to protect against COVID-19. Therefore, the most effective way to protect yourself is to avoid exposure to the virus that causes COVID-19. Steps that you can take to avoid exposure include:

- Following general preventative practices: wash hands for at least 20 seconds as frequently as possible, avoid touching your face or mouth, stay at least 6 feet away from others, and avoid contact with people who are sick.
- Continue to take all medication as prescribed, and work with your doctor to explore the option to keep an adequate supply (usually at least 30 days) of your medications on hand.
- Avoid crowds and large gatherings, and stay away from others as much as possible -- especially if there is an outbreak of COVID-19 in your community.

**What are some other ways you can care for yourself during this time?**

As of March 18th, Monterey County is under an indefinite shelter-in-place ordinance to protect the safety of our most vulnerable county residents. However, social distancing can often take a toll on our physical and mental/emotional health. The following tips can help combat the "shelter-in-place blues":

- Create a routine or schedule to follow -- even just planning to eat lunch at the same time every day can help maintain a sense of normalcy.
- Stay connected with friends and/or family remotely, through text, phone call, or video chat.
- Try your best to get eight hours of sleep a night.
- Drink plenty of water and eat nourishing foods.
- Spend time outdoors -- while ensuring you practice social distancing.
- Find a way to move your body every day -- a simple walk can release feel-good endorphins, and there are plenty of free yoga and other exercise classes online.
Changes to SSP Protocol at Access Support Network

Access Support Network, or ASN, has instituted changes to their syringe exchange protocol in response to concerns about the spread of COVID-19, in order to best protect those who utilize their services, as well as their employees. Some notable changes are:

1. **Reduction of hours**: ASN’s syringe exchange is now open only every Friday from 2PM-4PM. The syringe exchange is located at 12 E. Lake St., Salinas, CA, 93901.
2. **Syringe exchange is now set up outside**: The exchange is now located outdoors, to promote better airflow around the area and to allow individuals to stay 6 feet away from others.
3. **Individuals now allowed to receive additional supplies**: ASN is now able to provide individuals with up to 2 weeks of supplies at a time. This is an attempt to decrease foot traffic at the SSP each week, to promote social distancing.
4. **Up to four doses of Narcan can be picked up per visit**: Similar to the change listed above, this is another effort that will hopefully decrease foot traffic at the SSP each week.

Harm Reduction Tips during the COVID-19 Outbreak (adapted from Harm Reduction Coalition)

**Practice Safer Drug Use**
- Minimize contact with others, and minimize your need to share supplies as much as possible
- Prepare your own drugs if possible, wash or sanitize your hands before and after using drugs, and use fresh equipment when it’s available
- Create an overdose plan – EMS may not be as available during an outbreak, so keep Narcan and fentanyl test strips on hand to reduce your chances for overdose

**Keep It Clean**
- Sanitize the space in which you use drugs with antimicrobial wipes, 70% alcohol, or bleach
- Wash your hands before and after using drugs, and after interacting with other people. If fresh water and soap are not available to you, alcohol-based hand sanitizer works as well.
- Stay away from others if you feel sick. If possible, have a friend go to the pharmacy, your local SSP, and run other errands for you.

**Stock Up**
- If you take methadone or buprenorphine, talk to your doctor about keeping a 2-4 week supply on hand
- Try to stock up on supplies, as well as drugs if you feel that it’s safe to do so
- Prepare for a drug shortage. It’s possible that you may not be able to access your drug of choice during the COVID-19 outbreak. Consider alternative drugs or methods of use to prepare for this. It might be a good idea to keep ibuprofen, Pepto-Bismol, and/or Imodium on hand to prepare for a potential opioid withdrawal.

Additional Resources

To receive updates regarding COVID-19 in Monterey County, text MCCOV19 to 888777
2019 Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV Or COVID-19) (Monterey County Health Department)
Safer Drug Use during the COVID-19 Outbreak (Harm Reduction Coalition)
Syringe Services and Harm Reduction Provider Operations During the COVID-19 Outbreak (Harm Reduction Coalition)