



**American
Red Cross**

Northern California Coastal Region

August 27, 2020

EMERGENCY SHELTERS & HOTEL

Q: Why is the Red Cross moving people to different shelter or hotel locations?

A: We do everything we can to avoid having to relocate shelters and hotels, but sometimes it's unavoidable. Many Red Cross shelters are in schools and community buildings, and as these areas begin to recover, it's important for schools to reopen and businesses to get back to normal. Disasters require flexibility and planning for a number of variables. When we need to relocate a shelter or hotel, the Red Cross works closely with local officials to identify new shelter and hotel locations and assist residents in relocating. Our goal is to make this transition as smooth and with as little disruption as possible for people needing shelter.

Q: Who is paying for the hotel rooms?

A: The Red Cross uses financial contributions from generous donors to provide shelter and food after disasters — this includes providing hotel rooms for people in need.

Using hotels to help shelter people after a disaster is not new in this COVID-19 environment. The Red Cross responds to more than 60,000 disasters each year, the majority of which are home fires and after these smaller disasters, the Red Cross routinely helps families stay in hotels. Additionally, during large scale disasters, we have agreements in place with hundreds of local hotel partners who we turn to when there is a need to provide lodging for people who have been affected or for our disaster responders who travel to impacted areas.

If you wish to support our work, please consider donating at [redcross.org](https://www.redcross.org). Your gift is a commitment to helping people affected by disasters big and small.

Q: How does the Red Cross keep people safe in shelters? Do you have law enforcement on-site?

A: Our top priority is the safety of the people we serve and our disaster workers. We have a number of policies in place to help keep everyone safe and comfortable in Red Cross shelters. This includes knowing who is coming and going from the shelter, clearly posting signs with shelter rules, adhering to food safety guidelines and having trained disaster workers on-site 24/7 to ensure the safety of our residents and the cleanliness of the shelter. In addition, Red Cross disaster responders have completed and passed a background check, and have been trained in how to handle a number of situations.

Depending on local regulations and other circumstances, law enforcement may be on-site or regularly visit Red Cross shelters. The presence of law enforcement is not intended to discourage people from seeking shelter, but rather to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all. We strive to make Red Cross shelters a welcoming and comfortable place for everyone in need, regardless of race, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation or citizenship status.

Q: Where do people go after they leave Red Cross shelters or hotels, if they can't return home?

A: Organizations involved in relief efforts are striving to help people whose homes are unlivable. Red Cross workers are connecting with people still in shelters and hotels to help them plan for the future and make housing arrangements in partnership with other community organizations. These housing arrangements will look different for each individual and family. For example, some people may choose to live with friends or family while they rebuild. Other people will move into new apartments. And some people will be helped through transitional sheltering or other housing programs offered by government agencies or community organizations.

Q: Will the Red Cross still open evacuation centers or emergency shelters in response to a disaster amidst the coronavirus outbreak?

A: Yes, the Red Cross will continue to open evacuation centers and disaster shelters at the request of emergency management and in coordination with local public health authorities. Our goal is to provide anyone in need during or after a disaster with a safe place to stay where they feel comfortable and welcomed. To help keep people safe, we have, following guidance from CDC and public health authorities, put in place additional precautions.

- For example, we will work with local officials to set up a health screening process for everyone coming into the shelter, provide masks, add additional space between cots, and use enhanced cleaning and disinfecting practices.
- For the safety of our shelter residents and workers, the Red Cross is unable to accept material donations of any kind right now. Due to increased safety measures for COVID-19, storing, sorting, cleaning and distributing donated items could be especially dangerous.
- Due to these additional spacing requirements, we will also be unable to welcome pets into shelters. That's why we are encouraging everyone to use resources such as RedRover to find out where their pets can safely stay during an emergency.

Q: Can you provide additional details on the new sheltering protocols?

A: Specifically, these new protocols may include:

- Setting up a health screening process for everyone coming into the shelter
- Planning for setting up an isolation care area in the shelter
- Providing masks, tissues and plastic bags throughout the shelter
- Face coverings must be worn in all Red Cross shelters by both staff and residents
- Follow social distancing practices, as much as possible, by staggering meal times and adding extra spacing between cots, chairs, tables, etc.
- Providing additional handwashing stations, in addition to normal restroom facilities
- Increasing wellness checks to identify potential illness, including self-monitoring and checking temperatures of both shelter residents and staff
- Enhancing both cleaning and disinfecting practices throughout the shelter

Q: What is your hotel capacity? What if you don't have enough hotels to house everyone that needs shelter?

A: While responding to disasters during this pandemic, one of our priorities will be to continue our work with partners to find shelter for those who can't go home or need to evacuate their home. This includes working with hotels in advance of disasters to understand room availability. We continually coordinate and connect with hundreds of hotel chains and local partners to continue to build this capacity. In addition to

building these relationships with locally owned and managed hotels, we have also contracted with a travel vendor who has the ability to locate and secure hotel rooms nationwide and at scale.

Disasters require flexibility and planning for a number of variables — and sheltering is no different. Geographies, capacity, location in relation to damaged areas and room availability, all impact hotel capacity after a disaster. This is why we have backup plans to open congregate shelters, as we know there will be times when it is not possible to solely use hotel rooms.

Q: If you have a disaster where you are using both shelters and hotels, how will you determine who stays where?

A: Our goal is to keep people as comfortable as possible depending on their specific needs. It's hard to speculate knowing the number of variables that might come into play, but we plan to make these decisions on a disaster-by-disaster and case-by-case basis.

Q: Who is paying for the hotel rooms?

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Q: Does the Red Cross allow service animals in shelters?

A: Yes. Service animals are welcome in Red Cross shelters. If you go to a shelter, please bring your own crate, pet supplies, pet medications and food when possible. Shelter workers will do all they can to accommodate service animals comfortably.

Q: Public officials are telling people to social distance and stay home, but you're encouraging people to evacuate their homes. Why are you contradicting that guidance?

A: The stay at home orders are for your safety, but evacuations are for your safety, too. Many kinds of emergencies can cause you to have to evacuate if the area you are in becomes unsafe. Almost every year people along coastlines evacuate before hurricanes and evacuations are also common for wildfires. If an official government source advises you to evacuate, do so immediately. Follow CDC guidelines around social distancing and wearing a face covering to ensure that your evacuation is as safe as possible.

Q: What if a person refuses to be screened before entering a Red Cross shelter?

A: Screening people before they enter a disaster shelter is a critical step in helping to protect both our workforce and the people we serve. The Red Cross shelter manager will handle these situations on a case-by-case basis in coordination with public health officials; however, we will strictly enforce health screening protocols.

Q: During the screening process to enter a shelter, would the Red Cross split up family members if one member displays symptoms or a high fever and other family members do not?

A: We will work with families on a case-by-case basis to keep families together, while ensuring the health and safety of our workforce and the people we serve. When entering a shelter, if one family member is displaying symptoms or a high fever, everyone in that family would be considered potentially exposed and directed to an isolation area, until health professionals further evaluate each person. Depending on the circumstances, we may seek an alternative solution, such as potentially placing the family member displaying symptoms or the entire family in a hotel room.

Q: I have recovered from COVID-19. Do I need to adhere to Red Cross safety protocols in shelters?

A: The World Health Organization says that there is not enough evidence to support the notion that you can't catch COVID-19 twice or that you can't remain a carrier for the virus once you have recovered from COVID-19. For the safety of everyone in Red Cross shelters, we are requiring that all residents, even those who have recovered from COVID-19, follow safety protocols set by the CDC in Red Cross shelters.

Q: What will we do if someone comes to a shelter showing COVID-19 symptoms?

A: If a person showing COVID-19 symptoms arrives at a Red Cross shelter, we will not turn away that person or his or her family. Each shelter will be equipped to set up isolation care areas and will have health service workers on site to help ensure symptomatic residents receive further care away from other shelter residents. During a disaster, the Red Cross is committed to ensuring that everyone who comes to us in need has a safe place to stay.

Q: What would you do if someone in your shelter develops COVID-19 symptoms?

A: If a person staying at a Red Cross shelter starts to develop COVID-19 symptoms, Red Cross health services workers will work with public health partners to assess the situation and provide an isolated care area for symptomatic residents to receive further care away from other shelter residents.

Q: Are the protocols around media access in Red Cross shelters changing?

A: No, media will still be granted limited access as long as they are escorted by a Red Cross worker. However, we will need to make some accommodations as part of social distancing guidelines. Our goal is to be both transparent and reassure the local community about the precautions we have taken to keep shelters safe, clean and comfortable.

Q: Is the Red Cross still providing the same level of services after a disaster as you would normally?

A: COVID 19 has not changed our mission, and our volunteers are consistently answering the call, both virtually and in disaster-affected communities. We've created new protocols to help keep everyone safe in this environment. During this pandemic, while the nation is practicing social distancing, we're now providing some disaster relief virtually, including mental health support and financial assistance. And, depending on the circumstances of the disaster, we'll either prioritize individual hotel rooms or open more shelters that can support fewer people than normal.

Q: Does the Red Cross have enough workers to respond to disasters during COVID-19?

A: The Red Cross is made up of over 300,000 volunteers who support every aspect of our mission. During COVID-19, we have been regularly checking in with our disaster response volunteers to gauge their ability to support communities. Our volunteer workforce remains engaged and willing to step up to help in both critical in-person and virtual roles.

Q: Will the Red Cross fly people from across the country to support a disaster response?

A: Disaster relief always begins at the local level and we engage our local volunteer workforce to be the first line of support on the ground in any emergency. During COVID-19, this is no different. In this new environment, if we are unable to fill all the critical roles locally or in a virtual capacity, we will look to volunteers in nearby areas. If the needs cannot be met quickly through local resources, disaster responders needed to fill critical in person roles will be flown in to support the relief efforts.

Q: How is the Red Cross working with the government, including FEMA, during COVID-19?

A: Responding to disasters is a team effort and no single organization can do it alone — this is particularly true in this new environment we face. We coordinate with FEMA and both state and local government partners to plan for and respond to disasters. In addition, we also participate in government sponsored trainings and exercises to help plan how we will coordinate relief efforts based on various scenarios. This planning is a standard part of our regular collaborations with emergency management officials. Due to the unusual nature of COVID-19, close and frequent collaboration at all levels is more important than ever. For example, we are part of joint planning calls where we share critical information about our plans and capabilities.

FACE COVERINGS IN EMERGENCY SHELTERS & TEMPORARY EVACUATION POINTS

Q: Are Red Cross shelter workers required to wear face coverings?

A: Yes, Red Cross staff members are wearing face coverings at all Red Cross service sites and shelter locations.

Q: Can shelter residents wear homemade masks or face coverings, such as cloth masks, bandanas, etc.?

A: Yes, as long as the cloth or homemade mask covers both their nose and mouth in alignment with [updated CDC guidelines](#).

Q: What if a shelter resident or guest doesn't want to wear a mask or covering in a group shelter? For example, what if they have a medical condition that makes it difficult or impossible to wear a mask?

A: Everyone is welcome at Red Cross shelters and service sites, and it is our policy that everyone wear a face covering. There may be instances where individuals are not able to wear a mask due to significant health or mental health issues. The Red Cross will follow local government mandates and will work with these individuals to make alternative arrangements for the safety and wellbeing of the individual and the entire population.

Q: Will those affected also be provided surgical masks?

A: The Red Cross strongly encourages individuals to bring their own face coverings to group shelters or evacuation centers in alignment with [guidance from the CDC for members of the public](#). If a shelter resident does not have a face covering, they will be provided a surgical mask.

Ensuring people have a safe place to stay during a disaster is a critical part of the Red Cross mission, but how we support sheltering efforts may be different in each community depending on local plans.

- For smaller scale disasters and evacuations, we will prioritize individual hotel rooms or dormitory style rooms to make sure people have a safe place to stay. These situations include home fires, apartment fires and events where fewer than 2,500 households are evacuated.
- Since April 16, the Red Cross has already provided more than 51,000 hotel stays for people affected by disasters across the country.

- For larger scale disasters and evacuations, the Red Cross is prepared to open emergency shelters with COVID-19 specific precautions in place. Some of these plans include social distancing protocols, face coverings, health screenings, and opening more shelters that can support fewer people than normal.

Just as the Red Cross prepares for disasters, it's also important for people to prepare. The ongoing pandemic may have shifted emergency plans which is why it is more important than ever to prepare in advance by taking three simple actions: 1) Get a kit. 2) Make a plan. 3) Be informed.

- Make sure to include your pets as part of your emergency plan. Due to COVID-19, the Red Cross is unable to welcome pets into our shelters for everyone's safety. Pets are a part of your family, so please use resources such as RedRover to find out where they can safely stay.
- Your emergency kit should contain food, water and other basic supplies to last at least three days for each family member. Also, don't forget to include face coverings for all members of your household, essential medications, copies of important documents and special items for children and pets.
- Plan what to do in case you are separated from your family during an emergency and what to do if you have to evacuate.
- Be informed about which emergencies may occur where you live, work and play, and how to respond as safely as possible. Find out how local officials will contact you during a disaster and how you will get important information.

Download the free Red Cross Emergency app to get lifesaving preparedness information and weather alerts in the palm of your hand.

SAF PROGRAMS

Q: Can I still call if there is an emergency?

A: Yes, the Hero Care Network is still offering 24/7 emergency communications. Due to COVID-19, most Hero Care Call Center operators are working from home remotely.

