



CITY OF CHICAGO • OFFICE OF THE MAYOR



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MAYOR LIGHTFOOT ANNOUNCES LARGE SCALE EFFORTS TO DEVELOP A SYSTEM CARING FOR ALL OF THE CITY'S RESIDENTS DURING COVID-19

City reaches agreements with hotel operators to house patients for quarantine and isolation; announces additional measures to protect vulnerable populations and stem the spread of coronavirus disease

CHICAGO—Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot today announced new measures as part of the City of Chicago's ongoing efforts to coordinate resources and emergency response for the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). Working collaboratively across health and private partners, the City is increasing resources to improve safety and take the burden off of hospitals amid this unprecedented pandemic, and to allow residents impacted or at-risk for infection to safely seek shelter and recover from COVID-19.

Today's announcement includes two key new measures that will provide relief to hospitals and unlock new capacity to aid in the City's fight to prevent the spread of COVID-19. First, the City has reached agreements with local hotel operators to provide more than 1,000 hotel rooms for those exposed to or mildly ill with COVID-19 but who are not in need of hospital care to safely quarantine or isolate themselves if they cannot be at home. Second, the City has built upon existing social service partner agreements to provide emergency homeless shelter space that will better protect residents experiencing homelessness, who are more vulnerable to the spread of the virus.

"I applaud the commitment and dedication of our city's partner organizations as we work together to meet this moment brought by COVID-19 crisis," said Mayor Lightfoot. "By working in tandem with healthcare experts and local organizations to increase capacity for those affected, we have been able to develop innovative solutions to ensure every resident – regardless of status or where they live – are able to obtain the care and refuge needed to prevent the spread of this disease and keep every Chicagoan safe and secure."

HOTEL SUPPORT



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Beginning today, individuals who either have a COVID-19 diagnosis or who are awaiting test results, but who cannot safely return home and do not need hospital care can be transferred to downtown hotels rented by the City of Chicago. This will ensure these individuals do not put unnecessary strain on local hospitals and healthcare workers and will free up beds needed for more seriously ill patients. It will also decrease spread of disease in the community. Individuals will complete their quarantine or isolation period in their hotel room, under monitoring by City staff led by the Chicago Department of Public Health.

“The importance of social distancing measures in helping to contain the spread of this virus cannot be overstated, and when individuals don’t have a stable housing situation or can’t go home without risking spreading it to others, that can obviously exacerbate the problem,” said Allison Arwady, M.D., Commissioner of CDPH. “It’s especially important right now that everyone has a safe and secure place to stay.” The City of Chicago has reached agreement to provide availability of 200 rooms for individuals impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, expanding its existing capacity for quarantine and isolation. This is the first step in a series of agreements, which are expected to free up capacity at multiple hotel locations, spanning over 1,000 rooms by the end of this week.

“These companies and workers stepping up at this time should be held in the highest regard,” said Department of Housing (DOH) Commissioner Marisa Novara. “They are playing an incredibly important role in slowing the spread of this pandemic.”

The City's hotel agreements represent a unique approach taken by the City of Chicago to work with hotel owners, operators and workers to expedite the availability of safe spaces for individuals with mild illness from COVID-19 to recover. Chicago is leading the way by using underutilized hotel space to provide quarantine and isolation capacity as part of a broader public health response. The hotel space leased in Chicago will be reserved only for individuals who do not require hospital care but who must quarantine or isolate after being exposed to, or having tested positive for, the virus.

All hotel workers who work during any quarantine operations will be properly trained and will not directly interact with guests, who will be monitored by City staff, led by the Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH). As part of securing the first hotel agreement, the City worked with the hotel owners and Unite Here Local 1 to end an 18-month labor strike.

The first hotel to come online is Hotel One Sixty-Six, which as part of the deal, resolved an 18-month strike by hotel employees represented by Unite Here Local 1.



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Many of the hotel's employees will return to work with raises, healthcare, and no increase in workload for hotel housekeepers.

"I'm proud of the strikers for standing strong over these last 18 months," said Karen Kent, president of Unite Here Local 1, representing hotel workers. "I'm grateful for the unwavering support of the entire Chicago labor movement. And I'm thankful for the Mayor's leadership in taking this important step to protect Chicagoans during the pandemic."

The City's plan to leverage hotels in its efforts to supplement the capacity of its local healthcare infrastructure will also create new revenue-generating capacity for local hotel operators, which have experienced revenue losses as fewer travelers have come into the city, with fewer rooms booked.

"We are honored to help the City of Chicago provide safe accommodations for its residents," said Ronald E. Silva, founder, president and CEO of Fillmore Capital Partners, the San Francisco-based firm that owns the Hotel One Sixty-Six.

HOMELESS INTERVENTIONS

Over the weekend, the City of Chicago reached a new agreement with the YMCA of Metro Chicago to protect those experiencing homelessness by providing increased access to emergency shelter at select YMCA locations during the Stay-at-Home Order issued in response to the COVID-19 outbreak. This expanded partnership will create approximately 400 additional shelter beds and enable current shelters to abide by social distancing practices, requiring individuals to be spaced at least six feet apart. An additional 500 beds at other sites are anticipated later this week.

"The health and safety of all those we serve are among our highest priorities," said DFSS Commissioner Lisa Morrison Butler. "I applaud the YMCA for coming forward to help address a very critical need for homeless residents. Everyone has a role to play in getting ready, staying healthy and making sure the most vulnerable residents get the support they need."

The agreement with the YMCA is the first step in a series of efforts to bolster the City's response to COVID-19 for homeless populations, who are particularly vulnerable to contracting COVID-19. With shelter capacity at city-funded shelter agencies currently at nearly full at 99 percent, the Department of Family and Support Services (DFSS) has temporarily suspended additional referral into the shelters as it works to reconfigure congregate shelter settings to observe mandatory social distancing techniques.



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"Like so many Chicago institutions, nonprofits like the YMCA face an uncertain future. But that concern is secondary to the health and safety of Chicago's citizens - especially the most vulnerable in our community like displaced and homeless individuals," said Richard Malone, President and CEO of the YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago. "In partnership with the City and other community-based organizations, the Y is proud to step up to provide needed shelter in YMCA locations across the city that have been shut-down by COVID-19."

DFSS in recent weeks has also accelerated the work of its Homeless Outreach Program (HOP) team: increasing visits to encampments to provide resources, working to identify residents at higher risk for COVID-19 due to older age and severe chronic health conditions, and gauging interest in shelter placement. The HOP team has also deployed hand-washing stations to the city's larger encampments and has made sure hygiene kits, hand sanitizer and wipes are available. This outreach has been in partnership with multiple city-funded agencies that provide wraparound services for unsheltered residents year-round.

For more information and updates on COVID-19, text COVID19 to 78015, email coronavirus@chicago.gov or visit Chicago.gov/coronavirus.

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