

Severe Weather Response and Additional Winter Shelter Resources in 2020-21

Additional Winter Shelter Resources, 2020-21

Sacramento County Weather Respite Motel Voucher Program

In an effort to increase sheltering capacity over the winter months, the Continuum of Care (CoC) Board approved up to \$600k in additional funding in December to expand the program into a weather related response. The weather response utilizes up to 100 motel rooms for a minimum of three nights or longer during extended weather events. This approach offers several advantages to warming centers – it relies on outreach partners to identify unsheltered persons who would not otherwise be reached, it offers several days of stay (compared to an overnight stay at a warming center), it allows people to shelter with pets and partners and in privacy, which is critical during COVID-19. Referring partners are encouraged, when needed, to coordinate transportation for those entering weather respite. Sacramento County is excited about this new partnership.

The following criteria will trigger a weather related response:

- Nighttime lows of 37 degrees or lower for two or more days within a five day span; or
- Rain for two or more consecutive days (forecast 60% or more); or
- One day or night of rain combined with nighttime lows of 32 degrees or lower

COVID-19 Homelessness Response Services To Continue through Winter

Since early April, Sacramento County has worked collaboratively with City of Sacramento, Sacramento Steps Forward and homeless services providers to implement strategies to slow the spread of COVID-19 and mitigate impacts for persons experiencing homelessness. Sacramento County has allocated over \$23M (of the total \$37M current budget) to provide significant sheltering and rehousing services targeted to COVID positive and at-risk households; to support persons living unsheltered; and to support safe operations in congregate shelters.

- New Sheltering Services for 1,308 individuals in 1,077 households in Medical Isolation/Preventative Quarantine Units (through October). In early April nearly 600 units were opened for persons experiencing homelessness testing positive or most at risk of severe COVID-19 illness or death.

Three motels to continue into 2021. Originally funded through July, additional funding had been identified in response to the continuing pandemic enabling all sites to continue operations through September, when one motel site closed. The remaining 414 rooms will continue operations until the Cal Expo trailers operated by the City of Sacramento close in mid-December. It is anticipated that current funding will enable the three remaining motel sites (372 rooms) operated by County Department of Human Assistance to continue over winter and well into the first quarter of 2021.

- Re-Housing Services to transition participants to permanent housing. Sheltering services, including meals, security, and basic medical services, have enabled participants – many of whom are high-risk with complex and severe presenting issues – to begin to stabilize and look toward a transition out of homelessness into permanent housing. By connecting participants to problem solving funds, community re-housing programs and expanded re-housing services through the County's Flexible Housing Pool, the goal is to ensure no individuals are forced to return to unsheltered living.

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- Encampment Support for Unsheltered Persons

Since April, 58 handwashing stations and 52 toilets in 40 locations have been made available for use by unsheltered persons. Funded by the County Department of Health Services, ongoing servicing of these sanitation stations will continue through December and, pending Board approval on December 8th, through the first quarter of 2021. Additional trash removal services are provided for clean-up near sanitation locations and in areas where food is distributed.

Over 72,000 meals have been provided to unsheltered persons (through COVID team investments and volunteer groups) since the beginning of the pandemic, and approximately 200 pallets of water has been delivered to encampments throughout the County, with increased deliveries during the month of August.

- Proactive Testing at Shelters and Encampments County Public Health staff, in partnership with medical providers, conduct COVID-19 testing at shelters, encampments and isolation/quarantine care centers to ensure the health and safety of people experiencing homelessness. As of the end of October, 1,315 tests have been administered by this team, with nine tests returning positive results for COVID-19.

See *Sacramento County Responding to Homelessness* webpage for additional information and regular updates. <https://www.saccounty.net/Homelessness/Pages/default.aspx>

Winter Shelter Programs through HART

HART (Homeless Assistance Resource Team) is a network of non-profits dedicated to organizing passionate individuals in support of their local homeless population. With ongoing support from Sacramento Self-Help Housing, HART brings together individuals, churches, small businesses, and partner agencies to garner resources for the homeless in nine communities: Elk Grove, Citrus Heights, Rancho Cordova, Folsom, Carmichael, Arden Arcade, North Sacramento, South Sacramento, and Midtown

According to <https://sacselfhelp.org/programs/hart.html> , five of the HART groups have historically operated a rotating winter shelter during the coldest months of the year. During the winter season, HARTs in Folsom, Elk Grove, Carmichael, Citrus Heights, and Rancho Cordova have collectively sheltered 200+ homeless individuals per night. Information on 2020-21 winter sheltering or day services can be accessed through each HART program.

For additional information see the HART website https://www.hartstogether.org/get_involved .

Emergency Response to Extreme or Severe Weather

The County Office of Emergency Services (OES) coordinates implementation of the extreme weather emergency response in consultation and coordination with the Sacramento County Departments of Health and Human Services (DHS), Human Assistance (DHA), other affected county departments, and impacted cities¹.

¹Response operations are based on the National Incident Management System/Standardized Emergency Management System (NIMS/SEMS), consistent with those described in Sacramento Emergency Operations Plan (EOP).

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- The Sacramento Operational Area Severe Weather Guidance (“Guidance”)² provides direction for local governments, non-governmental organizations, and other agencies in preparing and coordinating severe weather-related *emergency* response efforts. The County Public Health Officer, along with the Chief of Emergency Services (or their designee), determines the need to implement the Guidance upon receipt of a forecast indicating the requisite criteria are met.

During a Severe Weather Emergency warming centers may be opened or other actions taken as specified in the guidance document when weather conditions pose a severe threat and one or more of the following exists:

- Notification to/from the Office of Emergency Services (OES) that local jurisdictions have issued a special notice (warning, alert, etc.), however the EOCs have not been activated;
- The National Weather Services (NWS) extreme cold/freeze warnings or wind chill warnings indicate weather conditions of extreme cold/freeze conditions that endanger human life with credible weather forecasts ***of extremely cold/freezing weather for three (3) consecutive days***. These weather conditions ***include abnormally low daytime temperatures accompanied by night temperatures of 32 degrees Fahrenheit, or less***;
- Abnormal human medical emergencies and mortality due to severe/extreme weather conditions;
- Abnormal animal mortality due to severe/extreme weather; or
- CAISO Stage 3 Electrical emergency and/or extended power outages due to severe/extreme weather conditions, blackouts or rotating blackouts.

What is considered a severe/extreme weather condition?

- The issuance of an extreme cold/freeze Advisory or Warning by the NWS (key indicator)
- Credible weather forecast of extreme cold/freezing weather for three (3) consecutive days and abnormally low daytime temperatures accompanied by night temperatures of 32 degrees Fahrenheit, or less.

How are we alerted to severe/extreme weather conditions?

The NWS issues several products intended to raise the public awareness to prevent weather-related illness from occurring and to assist local officials with decision-making responsibilities related to an extreme temperature event. Those products include:

NWS Partner Email. Issued when the potential exists for a weather event, such as excessive cold/freeze, in the next 1-7 days. This email is a non-public product and is intended to assist NWS partners with making operational plans, based on potential weather events.

Watch. Issued when the risk of a hazardous weather or hydrologic event has increased, but its occurrence, location or timing is still uncertain.

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<https://sacramentoready.saccounty.net/Documents/Sacramento%20Severe%20Weather%20Guidance.pdf#search=severe%20weather>

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Advisory. Issued when a hazardous weather or hydrologic event is occurring, imminent or likely. Advisories are for less serious conditions than warning but if caution is not exercised could lead to situations that may threaten life or property.

Warning. Issued when a hazardous weather or hydrologic event is occurring, imminent or likely. A warning means weather conditions pose a threat to life or property and people in the forecast area should take protective action.

Warming Centers

Warming centers are intended to provide a respite from extreme cold weather for vulnerable populations, including those who are unhoused. While warming center activation is predicated upon the Severe Weather Guidance, specifically the issuance of an Advisory or Warning from the NWS and credible forecast of severe/extreme weather conditions for a particular duration - warming centers may be opened by the County or any city, non-profit, or faith-based at their discretion for emergency response.

Sacramento County coordinates with and supports its municipal partners when opening centers to ensure access to facilities across the county. In opening centers, consideration is given to the following:

- Location of Facilities. Cities typically secure community centers and/or recreation facilities within their jurisdiction and control. Sacramento County may also open facilities in the unincorporated area as might nonprofit or faith-based organizations, as well. In 2020, County OES consulted with the COVID-19 Homelessness Response Team to better understand the location of unsheltered persons living in encampments to inform placement of warming centers. Sites must be ADA compliant or take other appropriate measures to ensure use by people with disabilities.
- Communication. Communication is coordinated through County and City Public Information Officers and includes 2-1-1, media releases, distribution of flyers, and communication to homeless providers through Sacramento Steps Forward, Park Rangers and Law Enforcement. All county residents including unhoused populations are also encouraged to subscribe to Sacramento-Alert.org to receive information. There are two subscription options for individuals to receive calls, texts and emails related to severe weather:
 1. County Severe Weather (Heat/Cold) Health Advisory
 2. County Severe Weather (Heat/Cold) Community Messaging
- Staffing. Center staffing is provided by the jurisdiction managing the center, though it may be augmented with volunteers coordinated through OES or other local volunteer organizations. When volunteers are unavailable or inadequate for unincorporated warming centers, staffing is provided by DHA and coordinated by Care and Shelter trained staff.
- Supplies. Warming centers typically provide blankets, water, and snacks, but do not operate as sleeping shelters. As budget allows, County OES may provide water and snacks for warming centers.
- Hours of Operation. Hours may be for nighttime only for warming (generally 8:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m.), but consideration may be given to 24-hours a day operations.
- Operations during COVID-19. County Public Health will work with jurisdictions opening centers to ensure safe operations during the pandemic. The California Department of Public Health provided guidance for cooling centers, but has not yet provided guidance for warming centers.

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- Transportation. Transportation to centers can be a particular challenge for vulnerable persons, including unhoused populations. The Guidance calls for a transportation working group to ensure vulnerable populations are provided transportation, including wheelchair accessible transportation and a way for people with disabilities to notify appropriate authorities when transportation to centers is needed. During the 2020 summer season, 150 bus passes were provided by Regional Transit. Additionally, publication of cooling or warming centers will contain information about bus stop and routes nearest each center.

Definitions

- A **Warming Center** is a facility that has been opened for short term operations due to a specific emergency or event. They are normally opened when NWS Advisories or Warnings are issued, a combination of temperatures (night time lows with low day time temperatures), wind chill, or power disruptions have or may become dangerous. Warming centers only provide modest snacks and water, they do not provide additional services or referrals.
- A **Cooling Center** is a facility that has been opened for short term operations due to a specific emergency or event. They are normally opened when temperatures have or may become dangerous. In referencing the National Weather Service Experimental Heat Risk model, this is often when temperatures reach “Magenta” Level 4 or Very High Risk for entire population due to long duration heat, with little to no relief overnight. Cooling centers only provide modest snacks and water, they do not provide additional services or referrals.
- An **Emergency Shelter** is a place for people to live temporarily when they cannot live in their current residence. The main differences between a warming or cooling center and a shelter is that an emergency shelter typically specializes in people fleeing a specific type of situation, such as natural or man-made disasters. Shelters also provide: sleeping accommodations, accessible shower and restroom facilities, meals, first aid medical and psychological care, and access to disaster registration for recovery programs.