



Encampments During the COVID-19 Pandemic

FAQ

What's is the District's current stance regarding encampments during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Per interim guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the District has begun implementing trash-only engagements, whenever possible. Trash-only engagements follow the same notice requirements as full encampment protocol engagements; however, residents are not required to move their tents or belongings and the District only removes obvious trash and items that residents identify as trash or abandoned. The District maintains the ability to conduct full cleanup engagements when trash-only engagements are insufficient to remove the public health and safety concerns. Additionally, the District maintains the ability to conduct an immediate disposition at an encampment if an immediate health or safety risk is present.

What is the difference between a full encampment protocol engagement and a trash-only engagement?

Outside of the coronavirus (COVID-19) public health emergency, the District primarily conducts full encampment protocol engagements, which require residents to move their tent and belongings outside of the cleanup zone by a specific date and time, as indicated on a publicly posted sign. Items left inside the cleanup zone after the posted time are subject to removal and disposal during the full encampment engagement. The Encampment Coordinator then coordinates the cleanup in accordance with the Protocol, taking into account observations, interactions with residents over multiple days, weeks, and months, and all relevant information available to them.

During trash-only engagements, public signs are still posted two weeks in advance. However, at the set date and time of the cleanup, residents do not have to move their tent or belongings and the District only removes obvious trash and items that residents identify as trash or abandoned.

Is outreach to residents experiencing homelessness still being conducted during the pandemic?

The Department of Human Services (DHS) and its outreach providers, the Department of Behavioral Health (DBH), and DMHHS continue conducting outreach to residents during the public health emergency. Most of their engagements focus on providing life-saving information and supplies such as hand sanitizer, masks, information on shelter and testing, etc. as well as continuing efforts to connect encampment residents to housing, medical, and social service supports.

DMHHS continues to provide ongoing, in-person outreach and notice to encampment residents before all encampment engagement protocols, including those that are trash-only.

What efforts has the District taken to promote social distancing and good hygiene practices in encampments?

From day one of the public health emergency, the District began providing residents with information on social distancing of tents, options for shelter, and the elevated risks of staying outside. DMHHS distributes hand sanitizer, face masks, sanitizing wipes, gloves, trash bags, and water to encampment residents weekly. The District also maintains nine (9) Porter-Johns and 32 handwashing stations at our encampments with more than 10 individuals and areas that are heavily-trafficked.

Additionally, by reducing the number of cleanup engagements being conducted, we are encouraging and practicing less close contact between residents to decrease the spread of germs.

What efforts are in place to promote the maintenance of encampment sites during this posture?

DMHHS makes available trash bags, brooms, dustpans, and gloves to provide residents with what they need to maintain their own encampment site. The Department of Public Works visits the District's larger encampment sites once a week to dispose of trash bags filled by residents and left at existing trash receptacles.

If a site is unable to be maintained and is at elevated risk, DMHHS will schedule a full cleanup engagement. Examples of elevated risk include rodent infestation, large amounts of biohazards, large accumulation of items blocking sidewalks/roads, etc. After posting a public sign, DMHHS will continue to work with residents to try to help them better maintain their site. However, if that cannot be done, a full encampment protocol engagement will be completed in accordance with the Encampment Protocol.

The District maintains the ability to conduct an immediate disposition at an encampment if an immediate health or safety risk is present.

How did the District decide where to place handwashing stations and Porter-Johns?

Per interim CDC guidance, the District placed Porter-Johns and handwashing stations at encampments with more than 10 people. The District also placed handwashing stations at locations that are heavily-trafficked or where crowds tend to congregate. The placement was an interagency effort coordinated across multiple agencies and non-profit partners to ensure the locations with the most need are covered.

If I have a concern about an encampment, who should I contact?

If you would like to report an encampment or raise a concern, you can reach out to DMHHS at encampment.reports@dc.gov. Please note that DMHHS is not a law enforcement agency. If you have a safety concern or need to report a crime, please contact MPD by calling 911 right away. If you feel like someone is having a behavioral health emergency and needs immediate support, please contact DBH's Community Response Team at 202-673-6495. This team operates 24 hours a day.