

Coronavirus: Guidelines for shared accommodation

Introduction

In shared accommodation such as student apartments where a number of people live in close contact, there is a potential risk of coronavirus being transmitted. It is therefore important for all residents to minimise this risk through carefully targeted measures.

Medical background

The infection known as Coronavirus Disease 2019, or "COVID-19" for short, is caused by the SARS coronavirus-2 (also known as the "new" coronavirus). COVID-19 usually manifests itself through coughing, fever and breathing difficulties, with additional complications possible. According to the Federal Office of Public Health (FOPH) and the World Health Organization (WHO), transmission occurs particularly through close and prolonged contact. This is defined as contact with an infected person for more than 15 minutes at a distance of less than one metre. In addition, infection is possible through droplets or via surfaces.

Recommendations for communal living

The main rules to apply here are the general hygiene recommendations issued by the FOPH to prevent possible spread. The latest rules (as of 12 March 2020) include:

- Wash your hands frequently, using liquid soap wherever possible.
- Cough or sneeze into a tissue, or failing that into the crook of your arm. Carefully dispose of all tissues in sealed bins.
- Avoid touching your face with your hands.
- Do not shake hands with anyone.
- Regularly wipe down all surfaces and door handles in the kitchen, bathroom, WC and living room (normal household cleaning agents are sufficient).

In addition, the ETH Coronateam has issued the following guidelines for shared accommodation:

- Remind all residents to wash their hands immediately they return home.
- With communal activities and meals, do not share plates, cutlery, glasses, etc.
- Make sure all rooms are aired regularly.
- If anyone shows symptoms of an infection: inform all residents and take immediate precautions (see below).
- Make sure you have stocks of tissues and liquid soap.

Measures to take if a resident has a confirmed case of coronavirus

The FOPH gives clear recommendations on their website about the measures to take if a confirmed case of SARS-CoV-2 occurs in a household. The most important ones are listed below. In any event, always consult your GP or the cantonal medical service.

- If the symptoms are only mild, the infected person may stay at home, but always in self-isolation (see the relevant FOPH information sheet). Self-isolation means they must avoid all physical contact with other people as much as possible.
- Wherever possible, the infected person must stay in their room.
- The infected person should not share plates, cutlery, towels or similar with other residents. If possible, they should use a separate bath and toilet. If this is not possible, surfaces must be wiped down with household cleaning agents after every use.
- Any interaction between the infected person and others should be kept to the minimum possible. In addition, a distance of at least two metres should always be maintained between people.
- Self-isolation ends after a symptom-free period of 48 hours, as long as at least 10 days have passed since the original symptoms first started.
- All residents sharing the accommodation with the infected person should self-quarantine for five days after the diagnosis (see the relevant FOPH information sheet). During this time, all contact with other persons should be avoided.
- The infected person, as well as all their fellow residents, should monitor their health and phone their GP or the cantonal medical service if their condition deteriorates.

Action to take on suspected cases in shared accommodation

If a person in shared accommodation shows symptoms of a coronavirus infection, but the infection is unconfirmed, suitable precautions need to be taken. Contact your GP or the cantonal medical service to discuss the individual measures to be taken.

- All residents should minimise their contact with the sick person.
- All surfaces that have been touched or used by the sick person should be wiped down afterwards.
- If possible, the sick person should use separate utensils (plates, cutlery, etc.) and towels.

Links to more information

FOPH: Recommendations regarding self-isolation and self-quarantine →

FOPH: Protect yourself and others →