



To: Dwelling Place Employees  
From: Denny Sturtevant, CEO  
Re: COVID – 19 Response  
Date: March 13, 2020  
cc.: Dwelling Place Board

No doubt most of you have heard about the Coronavirus infection, also known as COVID-19. Board members and staff have been asking about Dwelling Place's response to this health crisis, given the many staff and residents who might be affected if there is an outbreak of this disease in West Michigan. As of this date, no cases of COVID-19 have been reported in the four counties we work in but we cannot be certain that there are no cases. In fact, we have been advised by the Kent County Health Department to assume that there are already infected persons in Kent County who, for a lack of testing supplies, may not yet have been confirmed. We have also been told that someone carrying the virus may have it for a relatively long period of time before they exhibit symptoms.

For all of these reasons, we intend to err on the side of caution to reduce the likelihood that Dwelling Place employees and residents will be directly affected by this infection or spread the infection to others. Today, for example, we made the difficult decision to postpone our Dedication and Grand Opening of Harrison Park Apartments, which was scheduled for Friday, March 13<sup>th</sup>.

Let me first say that we are NOT health care experts. Consequently, it is important for you to direct any specific health care questions to your physician, your County Health Department or other health care providers you work with. What Dwelling Place will do is share preventative information with you that is being provided to us by the Center for Disease Control (CDC), local Health Departments and other similar entities with health care expertise about this infection. To that end, I have attached several documents that should be helpful to you and your family in lowering your chances of becoming infected. Beyond simply sharing information with you about COVID-19, we plan to share information with residents in our properties through the distribution of flyers and the placement of posters at our properties.

We will also be implementing the following policies and procedures immediately to reduce the potential for an outbreak of COVID-19 among our employees and our residents.

## EMPLOYEES

1. Employees who have symptoms of acute respiratory illness are asked to stay home and not come to work until they are free of fever (100.4° F [37.8° C] or greater using an oral thermometer), signs of a fever, and any other symptoms for at least 24 hours, without the use of fever-reducing or other symptom-altering medicines (e.g. cough suppressants).

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2. Employees should notify their Supervisor and Human Resources that they are planning to stay home if they are sick.
3. Temporarily and until further notice, any employee who does not have sufficient earned paid sick time, personal time or vacation time accrued, will be allowed to let their sick time account accrue negative hours against sick time they might earn in the future, to ensure that they can continue to be paid while they are out sick or out taking care of a sick household member.
4. Employees who are well but who have a sick family member at home with COVID-19 should notify their supervisor and refer to CDC guidance for how to conduct a risk assessment of their potential exposure.
5. Dwelling Place currently does not require a healthcare provider's note for employees who are sick with acute respiratory illness to validate their illness or to return to work, except on a case by case basis when it seems warranted by management. We will continue to maintain this policy, especially since we know that healthcare provider offices and medical facilities may be extremely busy during this outbreak and not able to provide such documentation in a timely manner anyway.
6. Dwelling Place will follow the CDC recommendation that employees who appear to have acute respiratory illness symptoms (i.e. cough, shortness of breath) upon arrival to work or become sick during the day will be sent home immediately.
7. Dwelling Place will encourage employees to use appropriate respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene while at work. In support of this effort, so long as we can access supplies, Dwelling Place will:
  - a) Place posters in areas at each work location where they are likely to be seen that encourage staff to stay home when sick and which outline appropriate cough and sneeze etiquette and hand hygiene.
  - b) Provide tissues and no-touch disposal receptacles for use by employees. (there is currently a shortage of these supplies so please reference section d below).
  - c) Provide soap and water and alcohol-based hand rubs in the workplace in common areas and conference spaces (there is currently a shortage of the alcohol based hand rubs so please reference section d below).
  - d) Ask that staff routinely clean all frequently touched surfaces in their personal workspaces such as workstations, countertops, and doorknobs with disposable wipes provided by Dwelling Place. While there is currently a shortage of these supplies, employees will be asked to consider other options to disinfect surfaces such as diluted bleach solutions similar to those being recommended by the CDC on their website.  
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/home/cleaning-disinfection.html>
8. Dwelling Place will inform vendors that provide us with contract or temporary employees about the importance of sick employees staying home. We will also encourage them to develop non-punitive leave policies.
9. Dwelling Place will encourage employees, board members and residents to practice something the CDC calls "Social Distancing". In the context of what Dwelling Place has some control over, "Social Distancing" is a practice of reducing the potential for spreading disease by eliminating non-essential meetings, using on-line conferencing whenever possible, eliminating unnecessary travel, replacing handshakes with elbow bumps or some other form of greeting without the use of the hands and keeping 6 feet of distance between people whenever feasible.
10. Dwelling Place plans to request that cleaning vendors perform routine environmental cleaning at all residential and administrative locations. Environmental cleaning shall include disinfecting



door handles, chair and hand rails, meeting room tables, counters and chair arms, etc. in all common areas.

11. While Dwelling Place is not yet restricting conference travel for employees or Board members, we may choose to do so in the future, especially if a conference is taking place in an area of the country where an outbreak is active. We are presently checking with NeighborWorks, MSHDA, Yardi and other groups who routinely sponsor training and conference sessions that our staff attend, about their plans to cancel or postpone upcoming trainings.
12. Dwelling Place is also advising employees planning any travel to take certain steps including:
  - a) Checking the [CDC's Traveler's Health Notices](#) for the latest guidance and recommendations for each city and/or country to which they will travel.
  - b) Checking themselves for symptoms of acute respiratory illness before starting travel and notifying their supervisor and staying home if they are sick.
  - c) Asking employees who become sick while traveling to notify their Supervisor and Human Resources and to promptly call a healthcare provider for advice, if needed.
13. If an employee is confirmed to have COVID-19, Dwelling Place will inform fellow employees of their possible exposure to COVID-19 in the workplace but maintain confidentiality as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Employees exposed to a co-worker with confirmed COVID-19 should refer to CDC guidance for [how to conduct a risk assessment](#) of their potential exposure.
14. It is our intent to maintain full staffing at all of our administrative and property offices during this health crisis. This is especially important to ensure that residents feel fully supported by Dwelling Place. Depending on the severity of the outbreak or directives we receive from governmental agencies, however, Dwelling Place may take steps to reduce the potential for spreading the disease by asking certain employees whose work could be completed remotely, to do so in order to lessen the chance for exposure to the illness.

## RESIDENTS AND COMMERCIAL TENANTS (Customers)

Dwelling Place plans to circulate the attached one page informational flyers/brochures from the CDC and/or local Health Departments about COVID-19 to all of our residents and commercial tenants within the next two weeks. We also intend to place posters with this information at all properties in high traffic areas and on our digital bulletin boards for those properties that have them. All information will be shared in both English and Spanish. We understand that the CDC and/or local Health Departments may have informational materials in other languages, including braille, if needed.

Property management functions will undoubtedly be affected if there are any confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Kent, Muskegon, Ottawa or Oceana Counties, where we own apartment communities. Development of "property specific" policies and procedures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 is likely to occur over several weeks or even months as we learn more about best practices. For your information, I have attached a copy of some guidelines from the Institute for Real Estate Management (IREM) that we will be reviewing as we consider any further policy action.

Property management functions may also be affected by COVID-19 related policy directives we receive from HUD, MSHDA, Rural Development and/or other governmental groups with statutory or regulatory oversight responsibilities in our properties.



## SUMMARY

According to the CDC, the severity of illness or how many people will fall ill from COVID-19 is unknown at this time. For the general American public, such as workers in non-healthcare settings and where it is unlikely that work tasks create an increased risk of exposures to COVID-19, the immediate health risk from COVID-19 is considered low. If there is evidence of a COVID-19 outbreak in West Michigan, Dwelling Place will work towards expanding our response, depending on the levels of severity. In the meantime, I encourage you remain vigilant for any evidence that this disease may be affecting Dwelling Place, our staff and the residents we serve.

Finally, I sincerely hope that you will accept my invitation to share your questions, concerns and ideas about preventing the spread of COVID-19 within the organization and in our properties. Please feel free to share them with myself, with Justin Rhodes, our Human Resource Manager or with Kim Cross, our COO or Steve Recker, our CFO.

As always, thank you so much for your dedication to this work and for your understanding as we do our part to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

