

April 1, 2020



Dear family and friends of MnTC,

Since early March the MN Dept. of Health (MDH), the World Health Organization (WHO), and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) have all been working to quickly integrate and disseminate new information about the COVID-19 virus, as well as to continually update the best protocols for safeguarding individuals and communities.

At MnTC we have taken this very seriously since day one. Over the past weeks we have fundamentally shifted how we work and live as a community; how we interact and communicate with each other; and, how we continue to provide excellent care to those in need of treatment for addiction and co-occurring disorders. Given the prevalence of COVID-19 in and around Minnesota, we now realize it's impossible to entirely prevent anyone in our MnTC community from being exposed to the virus.

On March 28 we received our first report that a MnTC client in one of our facilities had tested positive for COVID-19. While we had been preparing for the potential of this event for weeks and have protocols in place, the reality still was somewhat jarring and upsetting for all involved. And while we felt encouraged that this client was released the same day that he went into the hospital, and also that we'd isolated him quickly when he first developed symptoms, we realize that it's likely that we'll see additional cases in our system before this pandemic is resolved. Governor Tim Walz recently stated that experts predict 40-80% of Minnesotans will eventually have this virus.

As you may know the vast majority of people, approximately 85-90%, who contract COVID-19 do not experience significant symptoms more severe than seasonal influenza – namely a fever, cough, or shortness of breath. However for a small number of people more serious complications can occur. We are continuing to take all precautions available to us to protect our community.

What We're Doing: Proactive Measures

Our medical team remains in close, almost daily, contact with MDH and other health authorities. We are following all protocols for how to handle a positive client in a congregate living setting and will continue to take whatever steps we can to protect the safety of our clients and staff.

Here is a summary of all safety measures we've put into place over the past 3 weeks:

1. We had previously ordered rapid test kits which arrived at our facilities on March 31. Effective immediately all intake candidates will first be administered a rapid test kit to identify whether or not they are producing COVID-19 antibodies, even if they are not symptomatic. Rapid test kits will also be administered to anyone potentially exposed to the virus. Anyone receiving a positive test will not be admitted into the program. All others will be isolated for 3 days before joining the community.
2. Per MDH guidance, any clients that present with a fever or other symptoms of illness – regardless of the reason – are immediately isolated from the rest of the community, both to provide them appropriate care and to create distance from others.

3. Medical staff are on site at all buildings for ongoing, daily monitoring of the health of our client community throughout the state.
4. We are conducting daily health screening of all clients and all staff.
5. Social distancing: We have limited the capacity in all counseling sessions, classrooms, dining areas, and any other group activity room to allow social distancing of at least 6 feet between individuals. Food service lines now have markings taped on floor to show clients how far to stand apart and not bunch up.
6. Temporarily suspended all non-essential physical visitations of our facilities; this includes family members, friends, volunteers, mentors, and non-essential (non client-facing) staff.
7. Restricted client movement between buildings; we are now providing all CD treatment, mental health services, spiritual care, and other activities in the client's primary residential building; in addition we are providing telemedicine services where-ever possible.
8. External client appointments for medical or legal needs, are only allowed on an emergency basis.
9. Large groups and external activities for all clients have been canceled
10. Special events, such as church visits, fundraising events, and professional conferences have all been canceled, postponed, or moved to an online environment.
11. Comprehensively assessed all practices and operations to ensure that our control plan has essential elements and continues to be in compliance with healthcare guidelines.
12. Posted information and provided each facility with CDC-approved cleaning and sanitation products.
13. Established communication processes to keep all staff members informed of changing conditions and requirements.

I recognize that I'm sharing a fair amount of detail; however I share it because we care deeply about our community and the health and well-being of our clients, staff, and our families. The people we serve are here because they have a serious addiction and they need our help. We are taking all possible proactive measures to safeguard your loved ones, while continuing to offer excellent care and professional treatment for our clients as they seek freedom from addiction.

We will continue to review all updates from our local health authorities as well as from the WHO and CDC. We will also continue to assess our infection control and prevention procedures to ensure that they are effective and consistent with the best practices as established by these organizations. If you have immediate questions or for more information, please contact COVID19@mntc.org.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Eric Vagle
President