

Announcement: Springs Rescue Mission reports its first confirmed outbreak of COVID-19, responding with increased safety protocols



On Wednesday, Dec. 9, officials with the El Paso County Health Department and the Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment will announce that Springs Rescue Mission has experienced its first outbreak of COVID-19 since the pandemic began.

The outbreak officially began Oct. 25 and there have now been 15 positive COVID-19 cases linked to the Springs Rescue Mission campus in downtown Colorado Springs. One other individual presumed to be positive has been tested and is awaiting results.

Those who tested positive include staff members and residents of the New Life program (residential men's addiction recovery program). Additional cases among the homeless population — including guests of Springs Rescue Mission — are currently being evaluated and will be reported upon proper vetting by county and state health agencies.

“We knew that as cases began sweeping the nation, it would be only a matter of time before we started seeing positives,” said CEO Jack Briggs. “We take this very seriously

and will continue to do everything we can to keep our city's most vulnerable men and women healthy, safe and sheltered.”

Springs Rescue Mission transitioned to "emergency response" mode in mid-March and helped to establish an "isolation shelter" at City Auditorium in downtown Colorado Springs, where homeless individuals who are symptomatic or have tested positive for the virus can seek safe shelter in which to quarantine and seek medical attention.

Homeless individuals found symptomatic upon screening at the Mission are immediately referred to the isolation shelter for testing. The facility has now housed around 200 individuals since opening, 74 of which were referred by the Mission. The vast majority of those individuals did not test positive for coronavirus.



Staff and volunteers at Springs Rescue Mission will continue to evaluate and address all potential risks of exposure to the homeless community and will continue implementing “Layers of Safety” protocols the organization developed in response to COVID-19. These protocols are consistent with Center for Disease Control guidelines and include:

- screening all guests for symptoms upon shelter entry;
- providing ready access to hand sanitizer and masks to all guests, volunteers and staff;
- increasing the frequency of cleaning and disinfecting;
- encouraging “social distancing” and other CDC-recommended selfcare techniques;
- implementing head-to-toe sleeping strategies in all shelter programs;
- posting signage related to and encouraging best practices in cleanliness and safety;

- requiring all staff, guests and clients to wash and sanitize hands upon entry;
- referring anyone with symptoms to seek appropriate medical attention; and
- requiring volunteers and non-essential staff to remain home/work remotely.

“We will continue to take proactive measures while working daily to provide reliable shelter, meals and life-giving services to guests,” said Chief Development Officer Travis Williams. “Please pray for our homeless neighbors and all who serve them as we work together to keep them safe.”

The Mission continues to work with health agencies and community partners to address and respond to the virus. Steps are being taken to make testing available to SRM staff, volunteers and guests.

According to experts, the U.S. homeless population is among the most vulnerable in the country when it comes to contracting and dying from COVID-19.

“Since the pandemic reached Colorado Springs in March, Springs Rescue Mission has balanced the risk of infection with the urgent need for homeless services,” Briggs said. “That balance became even more difficult when winter began. But we’re dedicated to figuring out what that balance is — how we can keep homeless individuals sheltered but also safe from the spread of COVID-19.”

Springs Rescue Mission needs community support, now more than ever, to keep these individuals sheltered, safe and healthy. Those interested in making a financial contribution, becoming a monthly donor or keeping up with information surrounding our COVID-19 response, can do so by visiting springsrescuemission.org.

