

Recommendations for Public Restroom Access During COVID-19

Toilet facilities for unsheltered New Yorkers were scarce enough before the outbreak resulted in so many public buildings and frontline services having to shut their doors, but now, at a time when hygiene is more important than ever for protecting the health of our city, toilet options are virtually non-existent. In April, the City opened a dozen portable toilet locations throughout NYC in response to this crisis, but most were not appropriately serviced or stocked, and the City removed them without notice.

To expand access to public restrooms during the COVID-19 pandemic, the City should immediately:

1.) Install porta-potties and/or portable restroom trailers throughout the city.

The City must immediately site porta-potties and/or portable restroom trailers throughout the city, and must ensure that the units are cleaned frequently enough to protect the health of those who use them. The porta-potties maintained by the Coalition for the Homeless and its partners, such as the shower center in [Harlem](#), are cleaned and disinfected after every use.

2.) Install the self-cleaning toilets, [currently warehoused in Queens](#), in sites with the greatest need.

Fifteen self-cleaning public toilets were tested and publicly displayed 12 years ago, yet they remain in storage today. For years, advocates, led by Picture the Homeless, have called for these toilets to be put into operation. These facilities must be brought out of storage and installed throughout the city to further expand public restroom access.

3.) Open public restrooms in City recreation centers, free of charge, with increased staff, cleaning, and proper PPE and distancing procedures.

The following sites in Manhattan and the Bronx should be prioritized.

Manhattan:

- Alfred E. Smith Recreation Center
- Asser Levy Recreation Center
- Chelsea Recreation Center
- Gertrude Ederle Recreation Center
- Hansborough Recreation Center
- Recreation Center 54
- Thomas Jefferson Park Recreation Center

The Bronx:

- St. James Recreation Center
- Williamsbridge Oval Recreation Center

4.) Offer incentives to businesses to open restrooms to the public, with appropriate staffing and cleaning procedures in place, similar to a [model used in Germany](#).

A network of restrooms exists throughout the city in businesses that remain open providing food and retail services. The City should offer incentives for businesses to voluntarily open their restrooms to the public, free of charge and without a purchase requirement.

5.) Disseminate information about public restrooms.

Public restrooms must be clearly identified through appropriate signage. Additionally, people should be able to consult paper and digital resource guides and/or maps to help them locate open public restrooms. These guides should be distributed by outreach teams and other groups working with homeless New Yorkers.