

# Coronavirus spread: Testing shows ‘stunning’ asymptomatic COVID-19 rate at Boston homeless shelter

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As the United States considers ways to [reopen businesses](#) and [emerge from the widespread isolation](#) in response to the [coronavirus pandemic](#), there are still unresolved issues being discovered about how the virus is spread.

One of those unresolved issues recently came at Boston's Pine Street Inn, which helps thousands of homeless people every day, including providing hundreds of beds for people to use every night.

The Boston Health Care for the Homeless Program began testing people with symptoms and traced a cluster back to the Pine Street Inn. After securing testing for everyone at the shelter, they discovered 146 of the 397 people tested were positive but asymptomatic, [WBUR](#) reported.

“So this was stunning to us. We were not expecting that. The shelter was certainly not expecting that,” Dr. Jim O’Connell, president of Boston Health Care for the Homeless Program, told WBUR.

“Asymptomatic spread of this virus, while known in the past, has always been thought to be just a small part of it. But it may be that in certain centers like shelters — as it was in the cruise ship, as it might be in prisons ... and nursing homes, for example — it can be a real problem. So we’re struggling about what the right thing to do is.”

The lack of testing, along with the early guidelines of only testing patients with symptoms, appears to have contributed to the spread.

In the interview with WBUR, O'Connell said people with symptoms were being isolated, but those without symptoms were able to "just do their normal daily activity, including staying overnight in the shelter, walk around town all day."

The kind of testing that revealed such a large asymptomatic cluster in Boston's homeless population hasn't been widespread. In fact, Boston hasn't tested its entire homeless population either, which means there could be asymptomatic people staying in other shelters and unknowingly infecting others.

Officials worry that because the homeless can't self isolate like most people, not understanding the full breadth of the problem could make containing the virus even more difficult.