

Illness has hit the Randy Sams' Outreach Shelter hard and nearly half of the 91 clients staying there are sick with the flu, pneumonia, strep or other illness. To slow the spread, shelter officials made the decision not to accept any new clients until at least next Thursday.

"It's very difficult to keep it contained. Literally everyone has been exposed," said Helen Diggs, shelter executive director.

Shelter officials and clients are doing all they can to prevent new infections by cleaning all touchable surfaces with bleach, and residents are being required to wear masks.

Tuesday is the day Diggs realized things they weren't dealing with a usual outbreak.

"That day we had several people with 103 fevers. They started feeling really unwell. After there were five or six ambulance trips in one day, I knew we were headed for a problem," she said.

Shelter officials spoke with providers in the medical community including CHRISTUS St. Michael, Wadley Regional Medical Center, LifeNet and the Office of Emergency Management.

Local medical providers are looking for a way to provide Tamiflu to clients of the shelter who need it but don't have the insurance to pay for the prescription, which usually costs more than \$100.

"Collom & Carney and emergency management are looking into getting us doses of Tamiflu. We can't afford \$100 per prescription. It's really to cover people who have no insurance," she said.

A plea to the community on Facebook earlier in the week for cleaning products and over-the-counter cold and flu medication brought in a huge response but the shelter could still use more help.

People who would like to donate supplies can drop them off at the shelter at 402 Oak St., Texarkana, Texas. It's not advised they go inside but they can call the shelter at 903-792-7024 and someone will come out and get the supplies. Supplies can also be dropped off between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m. Monday through Friday at the Randy Sams' administrative offices, 803 Spruce St., Texarkana.

"The community has been great. They've really stepped up. We want to thank the community. We really appreciate it. The medical community has also stepped up and has been awesome," Diggs said.