

UPDATE: Interim Infection Prevention and Control Recommendations for Patients with Known or Patients Under Investigation for 2019 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) in a Healthcare Setting



DATE:	4/16/2020
TO:	Health Alert Network
FROM:	Rachel Levine, MD, Secretary of Health
SUBJECT:	UPDATE: Interim Infection Prevention and Control Recommendations for Patients with Known or Patients Under Investigation for 2019 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) in a Healthcare Setting
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This transmission is a “Health Update”: provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; unlikely to require immediate action.

HOSPITALS: PLEASE SHARE WITH ALL MEDICAL, PEDIATRIC, NURSING AND LABORATORY STAFF IN YOUR HOSPITAL; **EMS COUNCILS:** PLEASE DISTRIBUTE AS APPROPRIATE; **FQHCs:** PLEASE DISTRIBUTE AS APPROPRIATE **LOCAL HEALTH JURISDICTIONS:** PLEASE DISTRIBUTE AS APPROPRIATE; **PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS:** PLEASE DISTRIBUTE TO YOUR MEMBERSHIP; **LONG-TERM CARE FACILITIES:** PLEASE SHARE WITH ALL MEDICAL, INFECTION CONTROL, AND NURSING STAFF IN YOUR FACILITY

- To address asymptomatic and pre-symptomatic transmission, implement source control for everyone entering a healthcare facility (e.g., healthcare personnel, patients, visitors), regardless of symptoms.
- Actively screen everyone for fever and symptoms of COVID-19 before they enter the healthcare facility.
- As community transmission intensifies within a region, healthcare facilities may consider foregoing contact tracing for exposures in a healthcare setting in favor of universal source control for HCP and screening for fever and symptoms before every shift, as well as the end of every work shift as described in HAN 492.

The Pennsylvania Department of Health (DOH) is releasing the following guidance to reiterate and clarify guidance released from the Pennsylvania Department of Health on [March 24, 2020](#).

The following updates are now recommended for healthcare settings:

- To address asymptomatic and pre-symptomatic transmission, implement source control for everyone entering a healthcare facility (e.g., healthcare personnel, patients, visitors), regardless of symptoms.

- This action is recommended to help prevent transmission from infected individuals who may or may not have symptoms of COVID-19.
- Cloth face coverings are not considered PPE because their capability to protect healthcare personnel (HCP) is unknown. Facemasks, if available, should be reserved for HCP.
- For visitors and patients, a cloth face covering may be appropriate. If a visitor or patient arrives to the healthcare facility without a cloth face covering, a facemask may be used for source control if supplies are available.
- Actively screen everyone for fever and symptoms of COVID-19 before they enter the healthcare facility.
- As community transmission intensifies within a region, healthcare facilities may consider foregoing contact tracing for exposures in a healthcare setting in favor of universal source control for HCP and screening for fever and symptoms before every shift.

DOH recommends facilities ensure policies and practices are in place to minimize exposures to respiratory pathogens including SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. These measures should be implemented before patient arrival, upon arrival, throughout the duration of the patient's visit, and until the patient's room is cleaned and disinfected. It is particularly important to protect individuals at increased risk for adverse outcomes from COVID-19 (e.g., older individuals with comorbid conditions), including HCP who are in a recognized risk category.

Universal Source Control

Continued community transmission has increased the number of individuals potentially exposed to and infectious with SARS-CoV-2. Fever and symptom screening have proven to be relatively ineffective in identifying all infected individuals, including HCP. Symptom screening also will not identify individuals who are infected but otherwise asymptomatic or pre-symptomatic; additional interventions are needed to limit the unrecognized introduction of SARS-CoV-2 into healthcare settings by these individuals. As part of aggressive source control measures, healthcare facilities should consider implementing policies requiring everyone entering the facility to wear a cloth face covering (if tolerated) while in the building, regardless of symptoms. This approach is consistent with a [recommendation to the general public](#) advising them to wear a cloth face covering whenever they must leave their home.

Patients and Visitors

Patients and visitors should, ideally, be wearing their own cloth face covering upon arrival to the facility. If not, they should be offered a facemask or cloth face covering as supplies allow, which should be worn while they are in the facility (if tolerated). They should also be instructed that if they must touch or adjust their cloth face covering, they should perform hand hygiene immediately before and after. Facemasks and cloth face coverings should not be placed on young children under age 2, anyone who has trouble breathing, or anyone who is unconscious, incapacitated or otherwise unable to remove the mask without assistance. Patients may remove their cloth face covering when in their rooms but should put them back on when leaving their room or when others (e.g., HCP, visitors) enter the room. Screening for symptoms and appropriate triage, evaluation, and isolation of individuals who report symptoms should still occur.

Healthcare Providers (HCP)

As part of source control efforts, HCP should wear a facemask at all times while they are in the healthcare facility. When available, facemasks are generally preferred over cloth face coverings for HCP as facemasks offer both source control and protection for the wearer against exposure to splashes and sprays of infectious material from others. **If there are anticipated shortages of facemasks, facemasks should be prioritized for HCP and then for patients with symptoms of COVID-19 (as supply allows). Cloth face coverings should NOT be worn instead of a respirator or facemask if more than source control is required.**

Some HCP whose job duties do not require PPE (e.g., clerical personnel) might continue to wear their cloth face covering for source control while in the healthcare facility. Other HCP (e.g., nurses, physicians) might wear their cloth face covering for part of the day when not engaged in direct patient care activities, only switching to a respirator or facemask when PPE is required. To avoid risking self-contamination, HCP should consider continuing to wear their respirator or facemask ([extended use](#)) instead of intermittently switching back to their cloth face covering. Of note, N95s with an exhaust valve might not provide source control. HCP should remove their respirator or facemask and put on their cloth face covering when leaving the facility at the end of their shift. They should also be instructed that if they must touch or adjust their facemask or cloth face covering, they should perform hand hygiene immediately before and after.

HCP should have received job-specific training on PPE and demonstrated competency with selection and proper use (e.g., putting on and removing without self-contamination).

Because cloth face coverings can become saturated with respiratory secretions, care should be taken to prevent self-contamination. They should be changed if they become soiled, damp, or hard to breathe through, laundered regularly (e.g., daily and when soiled), and, hand hygiene should be performed immediately before and after any contact with the cloth face covering. Facilities should also provide training about when, how, and where cloth face coverings can be used (e.g., frequency of laundering, guidance on when to replace, circumstances when they can be worn in the facility, importance of hand hygiene to prevent contamination).

- **Before Arrival**

- When scheduling appointments for routine medical care (e.g., annual physical, elective surgery), instruct patients to call ahead and discuss the need to reschedule their appointment if they develop fever or symptoms of COVID-19 on the day they are scheduled to be seen. Advise them that they should put on their own cloth face covering, regardless of symptoms, before entering the facility.
- When scheduling appointments for patients requesting evaluation for possible COVID-19, use nurse-directed triage protocols to determine if an appointment is necessary or if the patient can be managed from home.
 - If the patient must come in for an appointment, instruct them to call beforehand to inform triage personnel that they have symptoms of COVID-19 and to take appropriate preventive actions (e.g., follow triage procedures, put on their own cloth face covering prior to entry and throughout their visit or, if a cloth face covering cannot be tolerated, hold a tissue against their mouth and nose to contain respiratory secretions).
- If a patient is arriving via transport by [emergency medical services \(EMS\)](#), EMS personnel should contact the receiving emergency department (ED) or healthcare facility and follow previously agreed upon local or regional transport protocols. This will allow the healthcare facility to prepare for receipt of the patient.

- **Upon Arrival and During the Visit**

- Limit and monitor points of entry to the facility.
- Advise patients and visitors entering the facility, regardless of symptoms, to put on a cloth face covering or facemask before entering the building and await screening for fever and symptoms of COVID-19.
- Take steps to ensure everyone adheres to respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette, hand hygiene, and all patients follow triage procedures throughout the duration of the visit.

- Post [visual alerts](#) (e.g., signs, posters) at the entrance and in strategic places (e.g., waiting areas, elevators, cafeterias) to provide instructions (in appropriate languages) about hand hygiene and respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette. Instructions should include wearing a cloth face covering or facemask for source control, and how and when to perform hand hygiene.
- Provide supplies for respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette, including alcohol-based hand rub (ABHR) with 60-95% alcohol, tissues, and no-touch receptacles for disposal, at healthcare facility entrances, waiting rooms, and patient check-ins.
- Install physical barriers (e.g., glass or plastic windows) at reception areas to limit close contact between triage personnel and potentially infectious patients.
- Consider establishing triage stations outside the facility to screen individuals before they enter.
- Ensure rapid, safe triage and isolation of patients with symptoms of suspected COVID-19 or other respiratory infection (e.g., fever, cough).
 - Ensure triage personnel who will be taking vitals and assessing patients wear a respirator (or facemask if respirators are not available), eye protection, and gloves for the primary evaluation of all patients presenting for care until COVID-19 is deemed unlikely.
 - Prioritize triage of patients with symptoms of suspected COVID-19.
 - Triage personnel should have a supply of facemasks or cloth face coverings; these should be provided to all patients who are not wearing their own cloth face covering at check-in, assuming a sufficient supply exists.
 - Ensure that, at the time of patient check-in, all patients are asked about the presence of fever, symptoms of COVID-19, or contact with patients with possible COVID-19.
 - Isolate patients with symptoms of COVID-19 in an examination room with the door closed. If an examination room is not readily available ensure the patient is not allowed to wait among other patients seeking care.
 - Identify a separate, well-ventilated space that allows waiting patients to be separated by 6 or more feet, with easy access to respiratory hygiene supplies.
 - In some settings, patients might opt to wait in a personal vehicle or outside the healthcare facility where they can be contacted by mobile phone when it is their turn to be evaluated.
- Incorporate questions about new onset of COVID-19 symptoms into daily assessments of all admitted patients. Monitor for and evaluate all new fevers and symptoms consistent with COVID-19 among patients. Place any patient with unexplained fever or symptoms of COVID-19 on appropriate Transmission-Based Precautions and evaluate.
- Prioritize patients with suspected COVID-19 who require admission to a hospital or congregate care setting (e.g., nursing home) for testing.
- **Additional Strategies to Minimize Chances for Exposure:**
 - Implement alternatives to face-to-face triage and visits.
 - Learn more about how healthcare facilities can [Prepare for Community Transmission](#)

- Designate an area at the facility (e.g., an ancillary building or temporary structure) or identify a location in the area to be a “respiratory virus evaluation center” where patients with fever or COVID-19 symptoms can seek evaluation and care.
- Cancel group healthcare activities (e.g., group therapy, recreational activities).
- Postpone elective procedures, surgeries, and non-urgent outpatient visits.

Categories of Health Alert messages:

Health Alert: conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention.

Health Advisory: provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action.

Health Update: provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; unlikely to require immediate action.

This information is current as of April 16, 2020 but may be modified in the future. We will continue to post updated information regarding the most common questions about this subject.