Preparedness Actions for Providers and Considerations for Vulnerable Patients

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Overview

- Preparing to manage suspect COVID-19 patients
- Planning for patient surge
- Continuity of Operations Planning (COOP)
- Messages to patients
- Vulnerable populations
- Personal preparedness for providers

Prepare for Suspect COVID-19 Patients
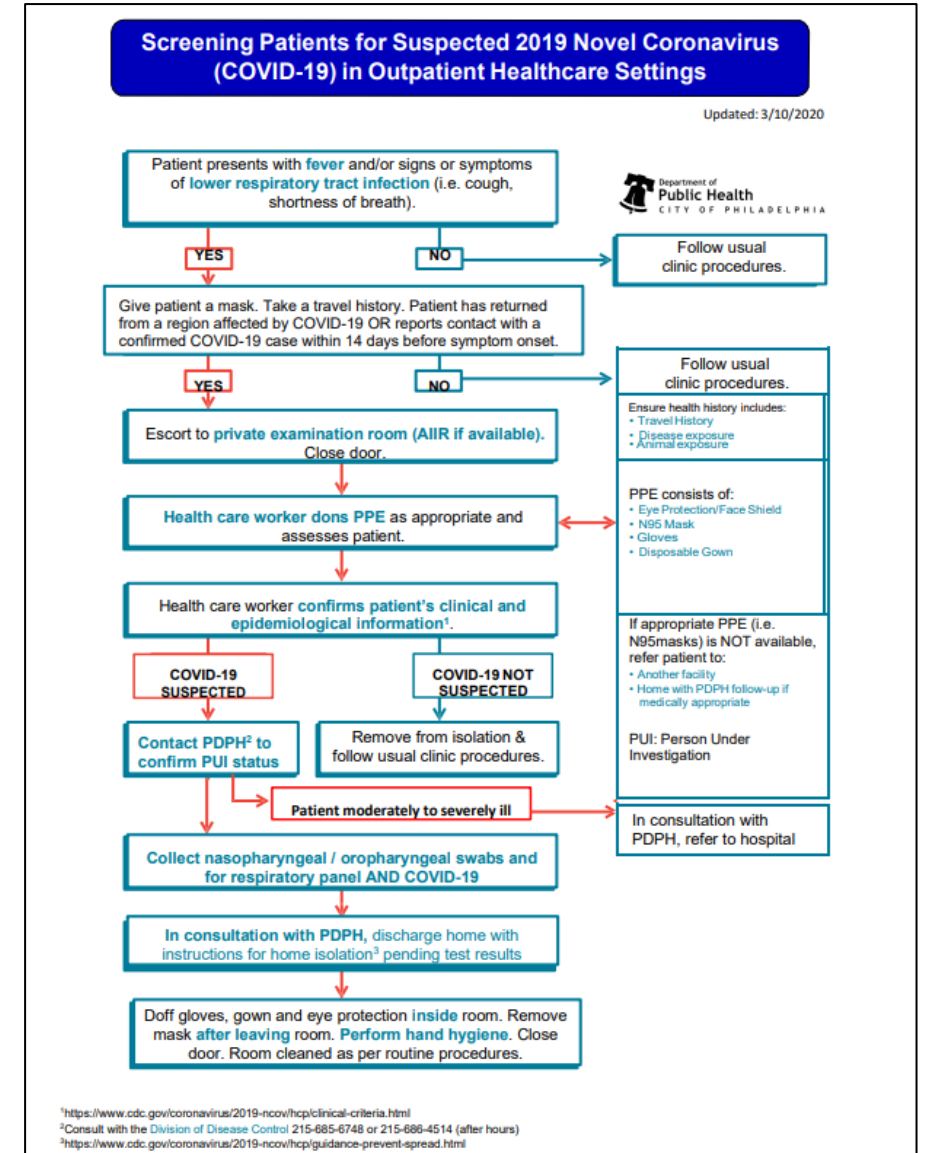

- Prepare to evaluate and manage persons presenting with respiratory symptoms and possible exposure to COVID-19
  - Post signs or posters directing patients to inform staff of symptoms of respiratory infection
  - Post signs or posters to remind patients to practice respiratory etiquette
  - Provide respiratory etiquette stations, including hand sanitizer, tissues, and surgical masks in waiting areas
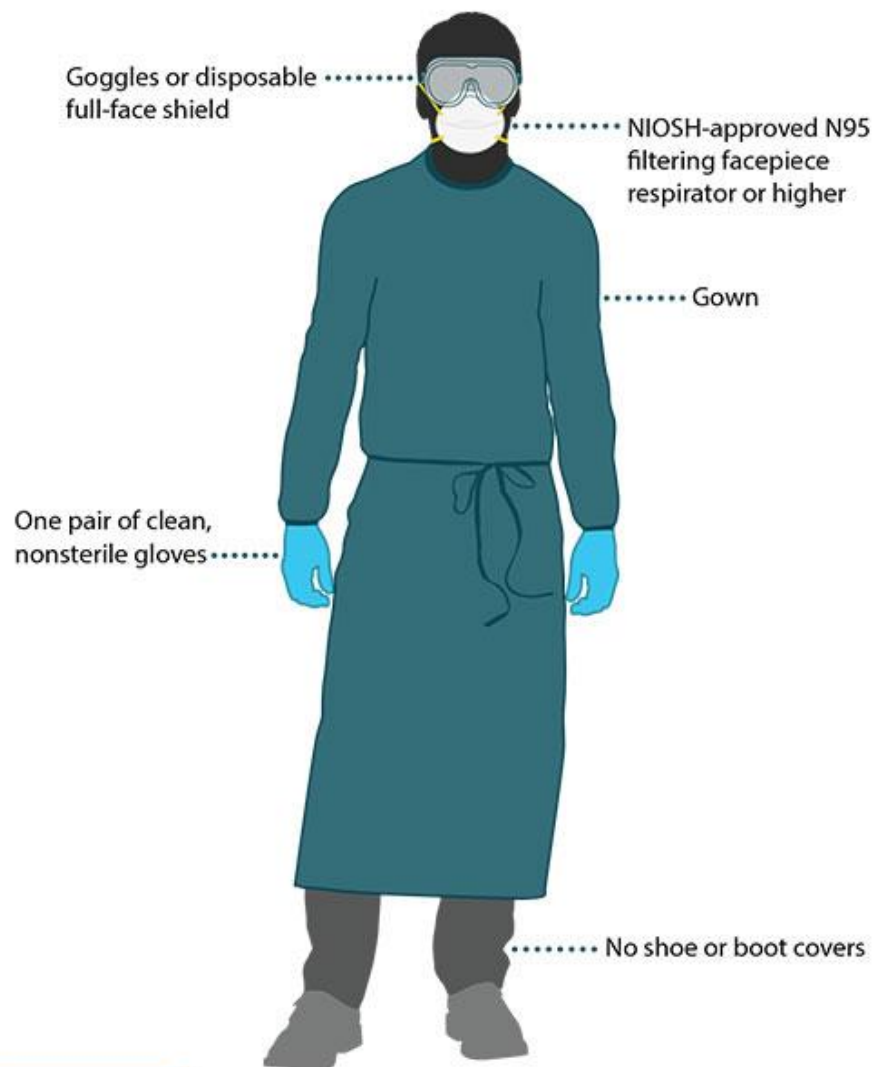 - Provide surgical masks to patients with respiratory symptoms

Manage Suspect COVID-19 Patients

- Review [procedures for evaluation](#) and [management of patients](#) with suspected COVID-19

- Meet with staff to educate them about COVID-19
  - How [COVID-19 spreads](#)
  - [Clinical management](#) of COVID-19 patients
  - [Infection prevention and control](#) recommendations for COVID-19

Screening Patients for Suspected 2019 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) in Outpatient Healthcare Settings

Goggles or disposable full-face shield

NIOSH-approved N95 filtering facepiece respirator or higher

Gown

One pair of clean, nonsterile gloves

No shoe or boot covers

For more information: www.cdc.gov/COVID19

Protect Healthcare Workers

- Clinicians should use recommended personal protective equipment (PPE) when evaluating patients with suspected COVID-19

- Familiarize staff with recommendations to help preserve the supply of N95 masks

- Develop a plan for managing healthcare worker exposures

Stay Informed

- Make sure your facility/providers are receiving the most current information
- Sign up for the Health Alert Network:
    - https://hip.phila.gov/HealthAlerts/SignUpHealthAlerts
- Health alerts and other materials are frequently updated on PDPH's Health Information Portal

Plan for Patient Surge

- Review plans to manage patient surge
  - Alter staffing models as able
  - Expand/modify hours if able
  - Reschedule non-urgent visits as necessary
  - Convert spaces for patient evaluation/treatment
  - Leverage telemedicine capabilities
    - Telemedicine can help to keep sick persons out of waiting areas
    - Health plans, healthcare systems and insurers/payors should promote the availability of covered telemedicine or nurse advice line services

Alternatives to Face-to-Face Visits

- Instruct patients to use available advice lines, patient portals, or to call and speak to clinic staff if they become ill with symptoms such as fever, cough, or shortness of breath
- Identify staff to conduct telephonic and telehealth interactions with patients
  - Develop protocols so that staff can triage and assess patients quickly
- Determine algorithms to identify which patients can be managed by telephone and advised to stay home, and which patients will need to be sent for emergency care or should come to your facility
  - Patients with mild COVID-19 illness can be safely managed at home
- Instruct patients that if they have respiratory symptoms they should call before they leave home, so staff can be prepared to care for them when they arrive

Managing Patient Surge at Inpatient Facilities

Reschedule elective surgeries as necessary

Shift elective urgent inpatient diagnostic and surgical procedures to outpatient settings, when feasible

Limit visitors to COVID-19 patients

Plan for a surge of critically ill patients and identify additional space to care for these patients

Continuity of Operations Planning

- Identify all essential functions of the practice
  - Identify primary staff who perform those functions, as well as other persons or cadres of staff who could serve as back-ups
- Plan for supply shortages
  - Inventory personal protective equipment, including gowns, gloves, surgical and N95 masks, and eye protection
- Establish emergency communication protocols for communicating with staff and patients

Workforce Management

- Review sick leave policies and instruct staff who are ill to stay at home until their symptoms have resolved
  - Establish non-punitive policies
- Review your facility's emergency plans for managing absenteeism and increased patient volume
- Minimize staff exposure by establishing flexible work hours for functions that do not involve patient care
- Review/develop policies for managing workforce depletion
  - Consider alternative staffing strategies and using alternatives to clinic visits for patient evaluation
  - Cross-train staff to perform essential administrative functions

Messages to Communicate to Patients

- Practice good hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette
- Stay home when sick
- Maintain a 2-week supply of food, water and essential household items, such as cleaning products, diapers and pet food
  - The Philadelphia Office of Emergency Management has tips on which **essential items should be stored at home** in preparation for any emergency
- Maintain a month-long supply of prescription medications
- Keep a supply of over-the-counter medications, such as fever-reducing medications, or other medications that household members use regularly
- Seek accurate information from sources like PDPH and the CDC

Persons at Risk for Serious Illness from COVID-19

- Older adults
- People with serious chronic medical conditions:
  - Heart disease
  - Diabetes
  - Lung disease

Prepare Vulnerable Patients

- Consider reaching out to patients who may be a higher risk of COVID-19-related complications to ensure adherence to current medications, confirm they have sufficient refills, and provide instructions for what to do if they become ill

- Advise patients to:
  - Stock up on supplies
  - Consider mail-order for prescription medications
  - Avoid crowds as much as possible
  - When in public, keep away from others who are sick, limit close contact, and wash hands often
  - Avoid cruise travel and non-essential air travel
  - Watch for potential COVID-19 symptoms, including fever, cough, and shortness of breath
  - Determine who can provide care if a caregiver gets sick

Guidance for Long-term Care Facilities

- Limit visitors to the facility
- Post signs or posters at entrances and in strategic places providing instructions on hand hygiene, respiratory hygiene, and cough etiquette
- Ensure supplies are available (tissues, waste receptacles, alcohol-based hand sanitizer)
- Observe newly arriving patients/residents for development of respiratory symptoms
- Take steps to prevent known or suspected COVID-19 patients from exposing other patients
- Limit the movement of COVID-19 patients (e.g., have them remain in their room)
- Identify dedicated staff to care for COVID-19 patients

Personal Preparedness for Providers

- Stay home when you're sick

- Check for any signs of illness before reporting to work each day

- Check with your child's school or daycare to find out about plans for early dismissals and how urgent information will be communicated

- Make arrangements for back-up childcare in the event that your child is sick or school is closed

- If you have elderly parents or relatives, consider how you will care for them if they get sick
  - If they rely on a caregiver, make back-up plans in case that caregiver becomes sick and is unavailable

Resources

- COVID-19 Webinar for Urgent Care and Outpatient Providers
  - https://hip.phila.gov/EmergentHealthTopics/2019-nCoV
- Strategies for Optimizing the Supply of N95 Respirators during the COVID-19 Response
  - https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/checklist-n95-strategy.html
- Healthcare Professional Preparedness Checklist For Transport and Arrival of Patients With Confirmed or Possible COVID-19
  - https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/hcp-personnel-checklist.html
- Interim Guidance for Healthcare Facilities: Preparing for Community Transmission of COVID-19 in the United States
  - https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/healthcare-facilities/guidance-hcf.html
- Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Hospital Preparedness Assessment Tool
  - https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/hospital-preparedness-checklist.pdf
- People at Risk for Serious Illness from COVID-19
  - https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/high-risk-complications.html