

March 5, 2020  
1:04 PM

Dear Home Health Foundation team member,

As you are aware, the World Health Organization and the Centers for Disease Control are managing a globally occurring illness, COVID-19, caused by a novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV).

The 2019 novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV) is a new virus that causes respiratory illness in people and can spread from person to person. The outbreak was first recognized in China and has since been identified in multiple countries, including the United States. The CDC continues to closely monitor the situation.

Please note that our community remains at low risk for this coronavirus, and patients with respiratory illness and fever are much more likely to have influenza or RSV, which are both at their peak in our community at this time of year.

The following is updated criteria from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for evaluating patients who are suspected to have COVID-19 infection. The Department of Public Health, in consultation with clinicians, determines whether a patient should be designated as a person under investigation (PUI) for COVID-19.

## Criteria to Guide Evaluation and Testing of Patients Under Investigation for COVID-19

Fever or signs/symptoms of lower respiratory illness (e.g., cough or shortness of breath).	AND	Any person, including health care personnel, who has had close contact with a laboratory confirmed COVID-19 patient within 14 days of symptom onset.
Fever and signs/symptoms of a lower respiratory illness (e.g., cough or shortness of breath) requiring hospitalization.	AND	A history of travel from affected geographic areas within 14 days of symptom onset.
Fever with severe acute lower respiratory illness (e.g., pneumonia, ARDS (acute respiratory distress syndrome) requiring hospitalization and without an alternative explanatory diagnosis (e.g., influenza).	AND	No identified source of exposure.

Source: CDC Health Alert Network, March 2, 2020

You should monitor CDC's travel advisories in order to appropriately counsel patients about travel and to know which travel itineraries present a higher risk for COVID-19 in symptomatic returning travelers. Travel advisories currently include the following countries:

- Level 3 Travel Warning (avoid all nonessential travel due to widespread community transmission): **Mainland China and South Korea**
- Level 2 Travel Alert (practice enhanced precautions due to sustained community transmission): **Italy, Japan, Iran**
- Level 1 Travel Watch (practice usual precautions but multiple instances of community spread have been reported): **Hong Kong**

When caring for patients, please identify if the patient has:

1. Fever (T > 100.4 F or > 38 C)
2. Respiratory symptoms (e.g., cough, shortness of breath), AND
3. Travel to high occurrence areas such as China, Hong Kong, Italy, Iran, Japan, South Korea, or close contact with a person with symptoms being evaluated for 2019-nCoV

**IF YES** and the patient meets all three (3) criteria

- The patient should don a surgical mask.
- Alert your manager *who will consult with the Mass. Dept. of Public Health at (617) 983-6800 to get further instructions.*

If you suspect a case of novel coronavirus, *please contact your manager who will contact the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) at (617) 983-6800 for assistance.*

### **Is there a vaccine?**

There is currently no vaccine to protect against Coronavirus. The best way to prevent infection is to avoid being exposed to this virus.

### **Is there a treatment?**

There is no specific treatment for the Coronavirus. People with the virus can seek medical care to help relieve symptoms.

### **What you should do to prevent getting the coronavirus?**

Precautions are similar to other respiratory illnesses:

- ✓ Maintain six foot distance from sick people and stay home when sick.
- ✓ Practice proper cough etiquette—cover nose and mouth with elbow or tissue when coughing or sneezing.
- ✓ Wash or sanitize your hands frequently.
- ✓ Keep your hands away from your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- ✓ Be sure you have received the flu vaccine.

If you were in a high occurrence area within the past 14 days and feel sick with fever, cough, or difficulty breathing, you should get medical care. Call the office of your healthcare provider before you go and tell them about your travel and your symptoms. They will give you instructions on how to get care without exposing other people to your illness. While sick, avoid contact with people, don't go out and delay any travel to reduce the possibility of spreading illness to others.

### **Surgical Mask/N95 Respirator/PPE Conservation**

To ensure an adequate supply of surgical masks and N95 respirators, we must ask everyone to prioritize the use of these items to ensure we can protect our workforce as we care for patients.

The CDC does not recommend that healthy individuals wear a facemask. There is no evidence that using a mask will provide any benefit to people who are not sick. A facemask should be worn by anyone with suspected or confirmed respiratory symptoms of COVID-19 or other respiratory viruses because it will help protect others from getting infected. A facemask should also be worn by health care workers and people who are taking care of someone with suspected or confirmed COVID-19.

We continue to closely monitor the COVID-19 situation and obtain our information from reliable sources: the World Health Organization, the CDC and our local state health departments, and will continue to keep you updated.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bernice Burkarth".

Bernice M Burkarth MD HMDC FAAHPM  
Chief Medical Officer  
Home Health Foundation