



CITY OF HOUSTON

Health and Fire Departments

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To All Members from HFD Medical Direction,

We would like to update you on current understanding and recommendations regarding the Coronavirus. Please take the time to thoroughly read through this communication, as failure to understand and follow the recommendations can lead to work restrictions, quarantine at home, and/or an increased personal health risk.

Where do we stand now?

We have several cases of Coronavirus in our community. It is believed that community spread of the virus is occurring. This means that we have at least one case in the community that we are unable to prove was acquired by travel in another city.

Due to the very nature of being first responders, HFD members are likely to be the first health care providers to interact with possible Coronavirus patients. Additionally, HFD has been called to health facilities where the treating physician was concerned that the patient under their care was at risk for Coronavirus infection and utilized HFD to transport the patient to the hospital.

Therefore, due to the higher risk of interaction with possible Coronavirus patients, it is imperative that HFD members understand 1) the criteria for identifying possible Coronavirus patients AND 2) the proper use of PPE in these situations. Note that this guidance comes from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Texas Department of State Health Services, and the situation is dynamic with frequent updates to the guidance. We will continue to monitor and update the membership of relevant changes as they occur in the future.

How do I identify a suspect case for Coronavirus?

Initial evaluation of the patient should occur from at least 6 feet away from the patient to determine if there is cause for concern for Coronavirus. If there is initial concern about the possibility, a HFD member in full PPE should approach the patient and place a surgical mask on the patient prior to any other history taking or physical examination. Throughout the rest of the patient evaluation and care, utilize the minimum number of HFD personnel necessary.

These are the three current categories for patients for which Coronavirus should be a concern.

- 1) Fever **OR** Lower Respiratory Illness in a patient who meets one of the following criteria:
 - a) The patient who, in the 14 days prior to their symptom onset, has had a close contact with a confirmed COVID-19 patient; OR
 - b) A health practitioner is referring the patient under their care for coronavirus testing
- 2) Advised by OEC or the patient of formal isolation or home quarantine for COVID-19 disease.

3) Fever **AND** Lower Respiratory Illness in a patient.

For these indications:

-***New as of 3/17/20*** **Fever is a temperature > 100.0 F or 37.8 C.**

-Lower Respiratory Illness is defined as cough or shortness of breath

-Close contact is defined as having direct contact with secretions of a COVID-19 patient OR caring for, living with, visiting or sharing a room with a COVID-19 patient.

-Formal isolation or home quarantine means the patient is being monitored by the health department for suspected or known Coronavirus infection.

What is the proper PPE for HFD members engaged in direct patient care where Coronavirus is a concern?

Proper PPE consists of the following, placed on in the following order:

- 1) Mask (N95 respirator)
- 2) Eye Protection (Safety glasses or face shield (NOT personal eyeglasses))
- 3) Gown
- 4) Gloves

Members who remain greater than 6 feet from the patient at all times are not felt to have an exposure risk but should consider wearing gloves if they may come in contact with the stretcher or other potentially contaminated surfaces.

What should I do if I am transporting a suspected COVID-19 Patient?

The patient should have a surgical mask placed on them for the duration of the transport. If oxygen is needed, it should be placed underneath the surgical mask.

It is very important to give advanced warning to the receiving hospital when you are transporting a COVID-19 patient, or suspected patient. Members shall transport these patients Priority Two and give a full report to the Base Station so the receiving hospital can be adequately notified by phone.

If the patient is stable, the E/O should proceed into the hospital without the patient in order to alert the hospital that they have arrived and follow the hospitals directions for bringing the patient into the hospital.

The unit shall be disinfected according to standard procedures for infectious disease.

Prior to leaving the scene, HFD Infection Control shall be contacted to be made aware of the transport.

The HFD Medical Director's Office will continue to advise and work with HFD Command Staff in order to provide the most up to date information available to assess patients properly and to keep members as safe as possible. Please continue to monitor official correspondence for updated information and guidance. Thank you for your diligence and hard work.