



# Department of Health

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**To:** Healthcare Facilities, Healthcare Providers, and Local Health Departments

**From:** New York State Department of Health

## UPDATE: INTERIM HEALTH ADVISORY:

### Ensuring Access to Health Care Services During COVID-19

**Please distribute to the Chief Medical Officer, Family Medicine and Pediatric Departments, Director of Medicine, Director of Nursing and all primary care and outpatient clinics.**

#### SUMMARY

In-person healthcare services, including routine preventive care and follow-up for direct examination and/or treatment needs, including all recommended age-appropriate vaccinations, should not be postponed. Access to preventive health care services is important to decrease the risk of negative health outcomes and outbreaks of vaccine preventable diseases that could overwhelm our healthcare system and endanger New Yorkers. When seeking healthcare services, individuals should take all the appropriate steps to protect themselves and others from COVID-19.

#### Individuals Seeking Healthcare Services

- Individuals experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 or any other infectious disease should notify their healthcare provider before coming to the office or clinic. Individuals may be instructed to come at a different time or use a different entrance in order prevent spreading infection. While seeking healthcare services, individuals must wear appropriate face coverings except when instructed to remove the covering by the healthcare provider and must practice hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette and comply with temperature checking and symptom screening.
- Starting April 1, 2021, individuals may bring a companion with them to healthcare appointments. Companions must also wear appropriate face coverings, practice hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette, and comply with temperature checking and symptom screening.

#### Healthcare Providers

- Healthcare providers must continue to ensure infection prevention and control measures are in place to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Separate individuals who are well from individuals who are ill. Strategies may include:
  - Scheduling well visits in the morning and sick visits in the afternoon.
  - Scheduling visits based on patient risk factors for COVID-19 severe outcomes, and schedule those at highest risk earlier in the day.
  - Separating patients spatially, such as by placing patients with sick visits in different areas of the clinic or another location from patients with well visits.

- Collaborating with providers in the community to identify separate locations for holding well visits.
  - Requesting that patients remain in their cars or outside the building while waiting for their appointment and call them directly into an exam room once ready.
  - Implementing triage before entrance into facilities (e.g., telephone triage, parking lot triage, front door triage).
    - Provide patients who screen positive for symptoms or COVID-19 risks factors with a facemask to cover their nose and mouth; and
    - Bring such patients to a private room immediately.
  - Providing necessary infection prevention supplies in patient accessible areas (e.g. tissues, waste receptacles, alcohol-based hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol).
  - Placing waiting room chairs at least 6 feet apart when possible. Consider use of physical barriers such as screens.
  - Removing any toys, reading materials, or other communal objects, or clean and disinfect such items between each use.
  - Designating staff who will be responsible for caring for patients suspected or known to be infected with COVID-19 and ensuring they are trained on infection prevention and control recommendations for COVID-19 and the proper use of personal protective equipment (PPE).
- Strategies to reduce transmission among healthcare personnel may include:
    - Ensuring the office has ample and readily available supplies of hand hygiene products (soap and running water as well as alcohol-based hand sanitizer).
    - Requiring healthcare personnel to wear facemasks (not cloth face coverings) at all times while on duty. Exceptions include while eating, sleeping, communicating with people who lip read, modelling speech as part of speech therapy, and when an N95 or higher-rated respirator or other respiratory protection is indicated. Masks and respirators may be worn according to conventional strategies (unless there are PPE shortages) until wet, soiled, damaged, or become difficult to breathe through.
    - Use eye protection according to [NYSDOH guidance](#).
    - Implementing health checks for all healthcare personnel and other facility staff at the beginning of each shift and every 12 hours while on duty. This includes all healthcare personnel and facility staff entering the facility regardless of whether they are providing direct patient care.
    - Healthcare personnel and other facility staff entering the facility with symptoms consistent with COVID-19 or with  $T \geq 100.0$  F should be immediately sent home. Healthcare personnel and other staff who develop symptoms or fever while in the facility should also be immediately sent home.
    - Follow [CDC](#) and [OSHA](#) guidance for cleaning and disinfecting environmental surfaces in healthcare settings.

Standards of care should be based upon relevant specialty society COVID-19 recommendations and in accordance with [New York State directives](#), including those for COVID-19 testing, PPE, and prioritization of procedures protocols.

### **BEST PRACTICES TO CONTACT PATIENTS**

- **Identify patients who have missed routine preventive care or follow-up services** in the past year using your practice's electronic health record and call or send letters requesting them to reschedule these appointments as soon as possible.

- **Communicate with patients** plans you intend to implement to minimize the risk of COVID-19 transmission in the office. This will further reassure patients that seeking routine health care services is safe.
- **Identify patients who have missed routine non-COVID-19 immunizations** due to the public health emergency, using your practice's electronic health record or the NYSIIS Reminder/Recall function. The Reminder/Recall function in NYSIIS can be used to generate standard or custom reminder letters, mailing labels, or lists of patients in your practice due or overdue for vaccines. Encourage eligible patients to receive the COVID-19 vaccine.

#### **RESOURCES:**

- NYSDOH COVID-19 Guidance for Healthcare Providers:  
<https://coronavirus.health.ny.gov/information-healthcare-providers>
- American Academy of Pediatrics COVID-19 Clinical Guidance Q&A:  
<https://services.aap.org/en/pages/covid-19-clinical-guidance-q-a/>
- American Academy of Family Physicians COVID-19: Guidance for Family Physicians on Preventive and Non-Urgent Care  
[https://www.aafp.org/dam/AAFP/documents/patient\\_care/public\\_health/AAFP-COVID-Non-Urgent-Care-Statement.pdf](https://www.aafp.org/dam/AAFP/documents/patient_care/public_health/AAFP-COVID-Non-Urgent-Care-Statement.pdf)
- New York State Immunization Information System (NYSIIS):  
[https://www.health.ny.gov/prevention/immunization/information\\_system/](https://www.health.ny.gov/prevention/immunization/information_system/)

Questions about this guidance should be sent to [covidproviderinfo@health.ny.gov](mailto:covidproviderinfo@health.ny.gov).