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**Guidance on Informing Patients of**

**COVID-19 Exposure by Healthcare Worker**

**Overview:** Given CommonSpirit Health’s ethical and mission-driven imperatives, CommonSpirit Health will notify all patients cared for by a healthcare worker (HCW) who subsequently tests positive for COVID-19. The information described below supports the principles and approach outlined in a CANDOR (Communications AND Optimal Resolution) program. This document provides assistance in that process.

**Process:** Once a HCW has been determined to be COVID-19 positive by confirmed test result, proceed with the following steps:

* Immediately inform infection control, patient safety/risk management, chief medical officer and chief nursing officer at the facility to provide assistance in ensuring the accuracy of the information and data. Also, the “event” (i.e., the exposure) should be entered into the applicable claims reporting system. The infection preventionist (or other designated leader) must notify the county public health department.
* Notify either Barbara Pelletreau at (415) 438-5567, or Roy Boukidjian at (818) 921-0380 to assist with guidance.
* Identify the time frame during which the HCW may have exposed patients to the virus, focusing on the HCW’s work schedule, the date the HCW first showed symptoms, and the date when the HCW tested positive.
* Using that time frame, identify patients who could be at risk due to exposure, and try to quantify the degree of risk to the patient.
  + Refer to the Healthcare Worker’s Exposure to COVID-19 (low, medium, high risk) that is posted on the CHI/DH COVID-19 SharePoint site.
  + Consider whether the patient has underlying illnesses that would make him/her more susceptible to the virus.
  + Consider the degree of contact that the HCW had with the patient based on the HCW’s position and scope of services.
* Generate a confidential and final list of patients to be contacted, including estimated number of days since contact with the HCW.
* Using the list of patients, identify the physicians who have primary responsibility for the patients, create a list of those physicians, and consider including the patient’s primary care physician, if known.
* Identify CommonSpirit Health employees who are well-positioned, based on their roles, to assist in telephone notification to the affected patients.
* Identify the availability of local physicians to provide immediate follow-up care should a more comprehensive physician response be requested by a patient.
* Draft a script for use by all employees who will be participating in telephone notification. See sample script in Appendix A.
* Provide additional educational materials and language access support as appropriate. Refer to patient education materials on CHI/DH COVID-19 SharePoint sites.
* Notify the treating physician via phone, electronic health record, secure email or fax. Draft a written notification fax/secure email/letter or memo to the affected patients’ physicians. Refrain from sending letters to physicians using US Postal Service which can cause delays. See sample physician notification in Appendix B.
* Establish a follow-up plan, including a call-in number for patient and family questions during the patient quarantine phase.
* Prior to initiating patient and provider notification, the CMO, CNO, and/or Facility Leader(s), separately or jointly, should review and approve the notification process, script and follow up plan.
* Allow for 15-20 minutes for each patient notification. Recognize the script will need to be customized based on the risk, time-frame and exposure time identified for each patient.
* After notifying the patient, document in the patient’s EHR the fact that telephone notification was made, including date and other details, as appropriate.

**Key Guidance:**

* **In order to comply with privacy laws, *do not use the name of the HCW*. Do not identify the HCW by gender, title, or role (nurse, doctor, aide) or any other identifying characteristic. Refer to the HCW as “the health care worker” at all times.**
* In sending any information (such as CDC information sheet) via email to the patient, do not use or include PHI. Simply state that the information may be helpful to them and is being provided as promised. (If any PHI is sent via email, the appropriate CommonSpirit Health secure messaging system must be used.)

**Appendix A – Sample Script**

**Sample Generic Script for Patient Notification**: Note that this script may need minor alteration to make it applicable.

**SAMPLE VOICEMAIL MESSAGE** (when patient cannot be reached)

Hi, this is xxxx from [CommonSpirit Health facility name] calling for [patient name] regarding your visit to our facility on [month/day].  It is very important that we reach you as soon as possible.  Please contact me at xxx-xxx-xxxx.  If you reach my voice mail I may be on the phone with another patient.  Please leave your name, telephone number and I will return your call as soon as I can. Thank you.

**SAMPLE TELEPHONE SCRIPT**

My name is XXX and I am a [job title] with [CommonSpirit Health facility name]. I am calling for [patient name].

Hello. My name is XXX and I am a [job title] with [CommonSpirit Health facility name]. I need to verify your identity. Can you please confirm for me your first and last name and date of birth? I am calling out of an abundance of caution to let you know one of our health care workers [may add: working in our XXXX clinic/facility] has tested positive for COVID-19. Before the health care worker knew of their status, they were diligent about wearing a mask and other precautions like washing their hands. Because the health care worker was masked, there is a low risk of spreading the virus.

However, guidance from the Centers for Disease Control requires that as a potentially exposed individual, you monitor your symptoms for two weeks. You were potentially exposed on [month/day] and your two week period will end on [month/day]. I know that news may cause stress or fear, but I feel it’s important to provide you with information on what this means.

In your case, it’s been xx days since your treatment at [CommonSpirit Health facility name]. While a person can experience symptoms between 1 to 14 days after exposure, the average is about 5 days.

Before I continue to discuss next steps, do you have any questions about what I’ve shared so far?

What you should do now:

* Self-monitor daily for symptoms like cough, fever, shortness of breath, sore throat, or muscle aches that are new or worsening through [month/day]. If you do experience new or worsening symptoms, please contact your primary physician immediately.
* We also recommend you to contact your primary physician if you experience additional symptoms that are not normal for you, such as diarrhea.

I want to repeat that your risk for contracting COVID-19 from this exposure is low. However, if you were to contract the virus, it is possible for you to spread it before you have symptoms or even in the complete absence of symptoms. So, in addition to monitoring your health for the next xx days, we want to provide you information on what you can do at home to protect others. This includes avoiding close contact with other people inside your home, hand washing, cleaning surfaces, covering your nose and mouth with a tissue when sneezing or coughing, and staying inside the home and only leaving your home for medical appointments. We have a flyer with this information that we use with patients that have COVID-19, but it is also helpful information for those that have had an exposure. Do you have an email address where I can send you the information?

Do you understand what you should monitor and that you need to avoid close contact with other people?

I do realize that this can be stressful. I am here for you and I want to provide you my contact number to call if you have any general questions during the next xx days – xxx-xxx-xxxx. If you have any clinical questions please call your physician.

Thank you for taking the time to talk to me today.

**Appendix B – Physician Notification**

Here is an example of notification to a physician regarding his/her patient’s exposure to COVID-19 (send via secure fax or email):

***CONFIDENTIAL AND PROTECTED HEALTH INFORMATION***

Date

Physician Name

Address

Address

Re: COVID-19 Exposure of your patient(s)

Dear Doctor: This letter is to inform you that a [CommonSpirit Health facility name] health care worker who treated your patient, [patient name], has now tested positive for COVID-19.

We have notified your patient by phone, and have advised him/her to do the following:

* Self-monitor his/her health for cough, fever, shortness of breath, muscle aches, etc. for two weeks following the exposure, which occurred on [month/day].
* Contact you promptly by phone if s/he develops COVID-19 symptoms

The health care worker who treated your patient was wearing PPE and observing all required precautions, so we believe the risk of exposure to your patient is low, but nonetheless we felt it appropriate to inform both your patient and you.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact: [Name] at [XXX-XXX-XXXX].