



Everyday health and preparedness steps in clinic

In response to the COVID-19 outbreak, the Academy is highlighting some everyday health and preparedness steps that our members can take now

Note: this is not an all-inclusive list of actions that you can take to protect your patients, your staff and yourself – see the links below for detailed and current guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO). Also, we recommend deferring to your respective state, and local government guidance. This is a fluid situation and this document may be updated regularly.

Screening recommendations to minimize chance for exposure:

Prior to Arrival

- Per the Centers for Medicare and Medicare Services (CMS) guidance, **all non-essential or elective medical and surgical services should be rescheduled or offered telemedicine services irrespective of their exposure or symptom status** (see **Attachment 1** for *Non-Emergent, Elective Medical Services, and Treatment Recommendations* from the CMS). These recommendations are intended to help in preserving PPE, hospital equipment, and hospital beds, and freeing up hospital, emergency room and urgent care hospital staff in the fight against COVID-19 and to minimize the risk of patient and staff infection in the office.
- Prior to arrival, assess the reason for the medical visit. Following this assessment, the patient should be seen based on the urgency and acuity of the condition. Limit non-essential or elective medical/surgical services for all patients, especially for those at high-risk of serious complications from COVID-19 (e.g., 60 years and older, and patients with comorbidities such as compromised respiratory system, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, severe hypertension, liver disease, kidney disease, internal malignancies, and immunosuppression as well as tobacco product users).¹⁻³
- For patients who do need to be seen for urgent or essential visits, measures should be implemented to minimize chance of exposure to COVID-19 before patient arrival, upon arrival, throughout the duration of the patient's visit, and until the patient's room is cleaned and disinfected (using the tactics described later in this document).
 - Prior to arrival for an appointment or on the day before the appointment, check with the patient if he/she has developed any symptoms of a respiratory infection (e.g., cough, sore throat, fever or shortness of breath) or new loss of taste or smell. Additionally, ask the patient if he/she has had any recent contacts with patients either diagnosed with or exposed to COVID-19, so that the team can be appropriately prepared. If the patient has symptoms or recent possible exposures, the patient should be encouraged to be rescheduled for non-urgent medical or surgical services (see **Attachment 2** for *Sample Script for Rescheduling at Risk Patients*).
- Individual dermatology practices will need to make their own protocols for what constitutes urgent and/or essential dermatologic care during the COVID-19 pandemic. The decision of which visits should be rescheduled, which can be transitioned to telemedicine, and which need to be in person

should be made by the treating physician based on the following from the CMS:

- Current and projected COVID-19 cases in the community and region
- Ability to implement telehealth, virtual check-ins, and/or remote monitoring
- Supply of personal protective equipment available at the practice location and in the region
- Staffing availability
- Medical office/ambulatory service location capacity
- Testing capability in the local community
- Health and age of each individual patient and their risk for severe disease
- Urgency of the treatment or service

Upon Arrival for patients needing urgent or essential dermatologic care

- Options to consider for social distancing for essential medical services include:
 - Suggest patients arrive alone, unless a companion is required
 - Suggest the patient wait in their car and be notified by cell phone when they can be seen for their appointment without spending time in the waiting room
 - If unable to arrive alone suggest, the individual accompanying the patient could wait in the car for the duration of the appointment
- At the time of patient check-in, ask all patients about the presence of flu-like symptoms (cough, fever, sore throat or shortness of breath) and new loss of taste or smell and contact with possible COVID-19 patients.
- Consider the necessity of conserving PPE during the pandemic. If you typically wear a mask for surgical procedures, consider wearing the same mask all day. If you don't typically wear PPE there is no current recommendation to do so while treating non symptomatic patients.
- Select appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) and provide it to all healthcare personnel (HCP) in accordance with OSHA's PPE standards ([29 CFR 1910 Subpart I](#)). Wearing masks and protective eyewear when taking care of patients may reduce touching facial mucous membranes for both physician and staff. Whenever the staff member needs to remove or adjust this PPE, they should first wash their hands with soap and water or rub them with an alcohol rub. (See [PPE Use Recommendations & Supply Chain Advice by the CDC](#) and [Rational Use of PPE for COVID-19 by the WHO](#))
- Patients should be advised, at time of scheduling an in-person visit for an essential dermatologic condition, that cloth face coverings are now [highly recommended by the CDC](#) for all persons when they have to go out in public, except for young children under age 2, anyone who has trouble breathing, or unable to remove the mask without assistance. In addition, patients should NOT be using a facemask meant for healthcare workers and should be advised to bring their own cloth masks.
- If the patient with symptoms or possible COVID-19 exposure must be seen that day, apply droplet precautions. Symptomatic patients who need to be seen in a clinical setting should be asked to call before they leave home, so staff are ready to receive them using appropriate infection control practices. Make sure the patient brings and wears a mask and place the patient in an examination room with the door closed, and notify all staff caring for the patient. Take care of their dermatologic

condition and refer them for evaluation and testing as guided by your local health department guidance.

- For all patients regardless of symptoms, limit points of entry and ensure patients adhere to respiratory hygiene, cough etiquette, and hand hygiene.
- Proactively minimize the need for in person follow up visits (e.g., post-surgical visits by using absorbable skin sutures or buried skin sutures only).

Between each patient during a clinic day:

Using the WHO recommended products below, wipe exam tabletops, countertop, exam beds/tables, doorknobs, and exam light buttons/handles between each patient during a clinic day.

At the end of each clinic day:

Using the WHO recommended products below, wipe all common high-touch areas at the end of the day, including but not limited to:

- Exam room: exam tabletops, countertop, exam beds/tables, doorknobs, and exam light buttons/handles, chairs including arm rests, and faucet handles.
- Bathroom: all bathroom surfaces, urine sample pass through areas/trays, and toilets.
- Reception: all countertop surfaces and chairs including arm rests.
- Offices: all surfaces and chairs including arm rest.
- Lab: all surfaces and countertops.
- Kitchen/break room: all surfaces.
- Trash cans: empty all trash cans, then use cleaning cloths to wipe the inside and outside of the garbage can thoroughly.

For the COVID-19 virus, the WHO recommends the use of:

- 70% ethyl alcohol to disinfect small areas between uses, such as reusable dedicated equipment (for example, thermometers).
- Sodium hypochlorite at 0.5% (equivalent to 5000 ppm) for disinfecting surfaces.
- [Any disinfectant products that meet the EPA's criteria for use against SARS-CoV-2](#)

Other steps to prevent virus spread include:

- Place additional hand sanitizers and wipes in the waiting area, exam rooms, bathroom, reception area, and throughout the clinic.
- Cleaning hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub between each patient and when in and out of the exam room (See **Attachment 3 & 4** for The World Health Organization's recommendations on how to handwash and handrub).
- Practice social distancing. Greet patients and staff with a nod, smile and/or wave. Do not shake hands or hug. Rotate staff if resourcing permits.

- Reduce chairs in waiting room and appropriately space them apart.
- Remove magazines and other reading materials from patient care areas.
- Educate patients on signs and symptoms of COVID-19 infection. Tell them to call their primary care physician or refer them to the appropriate agency in your community if he/she develops symptoms and has been in close contact with a person with COVID-19 (see **Attachment 2** for Communication Template to Patients).
- Consider reaching out to patients who may be at a higher risk of COVID-19 related complications such as elderly, those with medical comorbidities, and immunosuppressed patients to ensure adherence to current medications and therapeutic regimens, confirm they have sufficient medication refills, and provide instructions to notify their PCPs if he/she develops symptoms and has been in close contact with a person with COVID-19.
- Follow [the CDC's updated interim guidance on the risk stratification for potential HCP COVID-19 exposures in the health care workplace](#) to assess the risk of exposure to determine the level of monitoring and work restrictions. If you or your staff tested positive, follow [the CDC's Return to Work Criteria for HCP](#) and inform your office of the result. Remaining office staff should also be tested, and the office potentially shut down as per state and local health department instructions.

Attachments: other resources for ensuring the safety of your clinic

- **Attachment 1.** Non-Emergent, Elective Medical Services, and Treatment Recommendations by the CMS
- **Attachment 2.** Sample Script for Rescheduling Patients and Communication Templates to Staff and Patients
- **Attachment 3.** How to Handwash (WHO 2009 ^[1])
- **Attachment 4.** How to Use Alcohol-based Hand Rub (WHO 2009 ^[1])
- **Attachment 5.** Get Your Clinic Ready for Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) by the CDC
- **Attachment 6.** Helpful Internet Resources

References

1. Wang T, Du Z, Zhu F, et al. Comorbidities and multi-organ injuries in the treatment of COVID-19. *Lancet*. 2020.
2. Yang J, Zheng Y, Gou X, et al. Prevalence of comorbidities in the novel Wuhan coronavirus (COVID-19) infection: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Int J Infect Dis*. 2020.
3. Fang L, Karakiulakis G, Roth M. Are patients with hypertension and diabetes mellitus at increased risk for COVID-19 infection? *Lancet Respir Med*. 2020.

Attachment 1. Non-Emergent, Elective Medical Services, and Treatment Recommendations by the CMS

Non-Emergent, Elective Medical Services, and Treatment Recommendations

To aggressively address COVID-19, CMS recognizes that conservation of critical healthcare resources is essential, in addition to limiting exposure of patients and staff to the virus that causes COVID-19. CMS also recognizes the importance of reducing burdens on the existing health system and maintaining services while keeping patients and providers safe. CMS, in collaboration with medical societies and associations, recently created recommendations to postpone non-essential surgeries and other procedures. This document provides recommendations to limit those medical services that could be deferred, such as non-emergent, elective treatment, and preventive medical services for patients of all ages.

A tiered framework is recommended to prioritize services and care to those who require emergent or urgent attention to save a life, manage severe disease, or avoid further harms from an underlying condition. Decisions remain the responsibility of local healthcare delivery systems, including state and local health officials, and those clinicians who have direct responsibility for their patients. In providing in-person care to patients during the pandemic, particularly prenatal and maternity care, healthcare providers should continue to direct patients to accredited facilities and ambulatory care sites. However, in analyzing the risk and benefit of any medical treatment or service, the clinical situation must be assessed to ensure conservation of resources. These recommendations are meant to be refined over the duration of the crisis, based on feedback from subject matter experts. Professional societies are also developing resources for their specialties. Given this, CMS urges healthcare facilities and clinicians to consider the following tiered approach to curtailing non-emergent, elective medical services and treatment. Additionally, healthcare facilities and clinicians may wish to consider expanding capacity to manage a surge of patients seeking care. We anticipate there is likely to be a significant rise in patients with COVID-19 in the upcoming weeks.

Key considerations:

- Current and projected COVID-19 cases in the community and region
- Ability to implement telehealth, virtual check-ins, and/or remote monitoring
- Supply of personal protective equipment available at the practice location and in the region • Staffing availability
- Medical office/ambulatory service location capacity
- Testing capability in the local community*
- Health and age of each individual patient and their risk for severe disease
- Urgency of the treatment or service

* Clinicians should continue to work with their local and state health departments to coordinate testing through public health laboratories. See [CDC guidance regarding Criteria to Guide Evaluation and Laboratory Testing for COVID-19](#)

Tiers	Definition	Locations	Examples	Action
Tier 1	Low acuity treatment or service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medical office • FQHC/RHC* • HOPD** • Ambulatory care sites 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • E • Preventive care visit/screening • Annual Wellness or Welcome to Medicare Initial Preventive Visit • Supervised exercise therapy • Acupuncture 	<p>Consider postponing service</p> <p>Consider follow-up using telehealth, virtual check-in, or remote monitoring</p>
Tier 2	Intermediate acuity treatment or service Not providing the service has the potential for increasing morbidity or mortality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medical office • FQHC/RHC • HOPD • Ambulatory care sites 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pediatric vaccinations • Newborn/early childhood care*** • Follow-up visit for management of existing medical or mental/behavioral health condition • Evaluation of new symptoms in an established patient • Evaluation of nonurgent symptoms consistent with COVID-19 	<p>Consider initial evaluation via telehealth; triage to appropriate sites of care as necessary</p> <p>If no current symptoms of concern, consider follow-up with virtual check-in</p>
Tier 3	High acuity treatment or service Lack of in-person treatment or service would result in patient harm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medical office • FQHC/RHC • HOPD • Ambulatory care sites • Emergency department 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation of new symptoms in a new patient • Evaluation of symptoms consistent with COVID-19, with warning signs including shortness of breath, altered mental status, or other indications of severe disease 	<p>We would not recommend postponing in-person evaluation; consider triage to appropriate facility/level of care as necessary</p>

*Federally Qualified Health Care/ Rural Health Clinics

**Hospital Outpatient Department

***If a practice can provide only limited well child visits, healthcare providers are encouraged to prioritize newborn care and vaccination of infants and young children (through 24 months of age) when possible (see also CDC guidance for further information: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/healthcare-facilities/index.html>)

Attachment 2. Sample Script for Rescheduling Patients and Communication Templates to Staff and Patients

Sample Script for Rescheduling at Risk Patients

To the Patient:

Out of an abundance of caution and in response to the COVID-19 pandemic we are screening patients based on the urgency and acuity of your need for a face to face encounter. If your care is deemed a non-essential healthcare service, your appointment will be rescheduled to a safer time or you will be offered teledermatology service using your computer or smartphone.

If you will be coming to the office due to the essential or urgent nature of your skin condition, please make sure to wear a cloth mask and due to the necessity of social distancing, we are asking that patients wait in their car after checking in with the front desk. We will call or text your cell phone when the clinic is ready to receive you [In locations where this is a practical option]. If you are accompanied by a companion(s), we suggest that they wait in the car for the duration of the visit.

If you develop flu-like symptoms such as cough, fever, and shortness of breath and/or new loss of taste or smell contact your primary care doctor for management and reschedule your appointment with our office to a later date.

These steps protect you, your companion(s), and our clinic staff. Thank you for your cooperation during this challenging time.

Leadership Communication Template to Staff on COVID-19

Dear clinic colleagues,

At [], staff safety and health are our top priority and we appreciate everyone's efforts during this unprecedented time. We are currently updated daily on the status of the pandemic and changes in recommendations from the CDC, the FDA, the WHO, and OSHA. Our clinic is continually reviewing these recommendations to reflect the most current practice guidelines and any new federal and state actions. We will meet [daily/weekly] to provide you any updates on COVID-19.

Please note that for your safety and health, [] has implemented extra sanitary precautions in response to the COVID-19 outbreak. Our cleaning service will continue to clean every day and will perform more stringent daily cleaning to provide a deeper cleaning to all surface areas, restrooms, and exam and waiting rooms. However, we would like to ask you to clean and sanitize your desk, phone, and keyboard regularly during the day to further minimize the spread of the disease.

We value your partnership in this effort to maintain a healthy workspace for all our staffs and we will continue to keep you updated.

Please contact me if you have any questions, concerns, or need any assistance.

I hope you and your loved ones stay healthy and well in the coming weeks.

Sincerely,

[]

Communication Template to Patients on COVID 19

Dear patients and families,

We are committed to protecting the safety of our patients, staff, and the general public while maintaining high-quality care at our clinic and would like to update you on recent steps that we have implemented in response to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak.

1. If you currently have non-essential or elective medical/surgical services scheduled, our staff will reach out to you to reschedule it to a later date. This is in accordance with the current Centers for Disease Control and the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services guidance – “all patients being seen for non-essential or elective medical/surgical services should be rescheduled or offered telemedicine service irrespective of their exposure or symptom status”.
2. We are asking screening questions prior to your scheduled appointment and if you or anyone in your family meets certain criteria, we will reschedule your appointment to a later date.
3. We have a visit restriction in place. To protect you, other patients, and their families, no significant others, children or other family, or friends will be permitted in the office during your visit, unless necessary (e.g., a support person or supported decision maker for patients with disabilities who require assistance). We also request you wear a cloth mask during your visit, as recommended by the CDC.

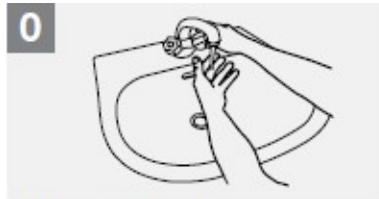
As a reminder, the best prevention you can take is to follow the [Stay at home/Shelter at home] order currently in place. If you must go out, remember to practice social distancing and frequently wash your hands or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Please contact your primary care physician or [] County Department of Public Health’s main line at [], if you are experiencing symptoms and think you need to be tested.

We thank you for your understanding if we may need to reschedule your appointment in accordance with the recommendations set forth by different agencies. For more information, please visit the Centers for Disease Control, World Health Organization, or [] County Department of Public Health websites.

Sincerely,

[]

Attachment 3. How to Handwash (WHO 2009 ^[1])



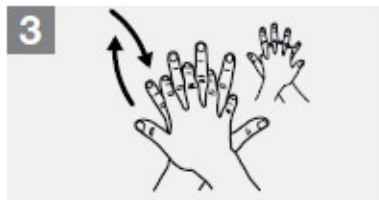
0 Wet hands with water;



1 Apply enough soap to cover all hand surfaces;



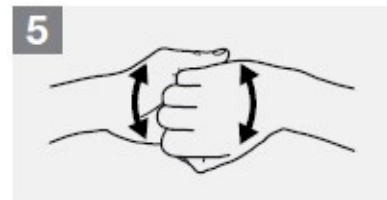
2 Rub hands palm to palm;



3 Right palm over left dorsum with interlaced fingers and vice versa;



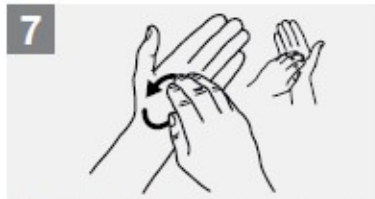
4 Palm to palm with fingers interlaced;



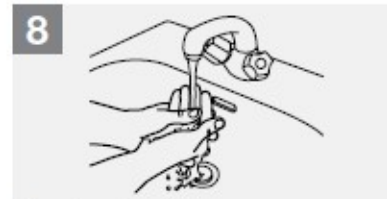
5 Backs of fingers to opposing palms with fingers interlocked;



6 Rotational rubbing of left thumb clasped in right palm and vice versa;



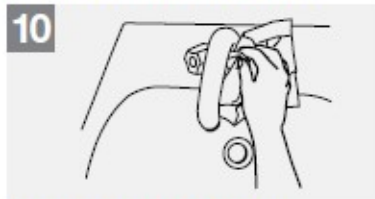
7 Rotational rubbing, backwards and forwards with clasped fingers of right hand in left palm and vice versa;



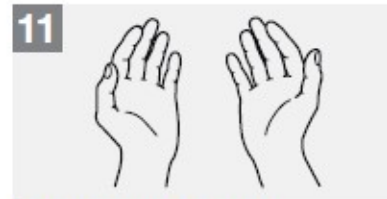
8 Rinse hands with water;



9 Dry hands thoroughly with a single use towel;



10 Use towel to turn off faucet;



11 Your hands are now safe.

[1] World Health Organization, *Hand Hygiene: Why, How & When?* 2009. Available from: https://www.who.int/gpsc/5may/Hand_Hygiene_Why_How_and_When_Brochure.pdf.

Attachment 4. How to Use Alcohol-based Hand Rub (WHO 2009 ^[1])



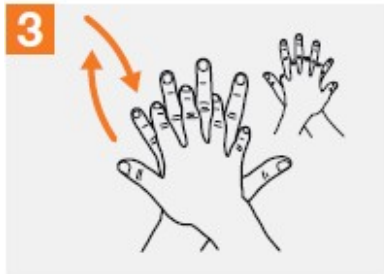
1a Apply a palmful of the product in a cupped hand, covering all surfaces;



1b



2 Rub hands palm to palm;



3 Right palm over left dorsum with interlaced fingers and vice versa;



4 Palm to palm with fingers interlaced;



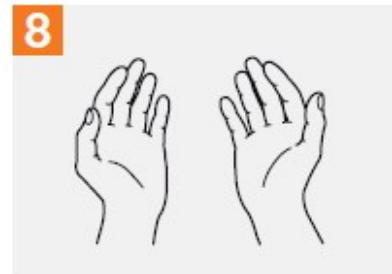
5 Backs of fingers to opposing palms with fingers interlocked;



6 Rotational rubbing of left thumb clasped in right palm and vice versa;



7 Rotational rubbing, backwards and forwards with clasped fingers of right hand in left palm and vice versa;



8 Once dry, your hands are safe.

[1] World Health Organization, *Hand Hygiene: Why, How & When?* 2009. Available from: https://www.who.int/gpsc/5may/Hand_Hygiene_Why_How_and_When_Brochure.pdf.

Attachment 5. Get Your Clinic Ready for Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) by the CDC

Get Your Clinic Ready for Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

A new respiratory disease—coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19)—may impact your community.

Get ready! Steps you take to prepare your clinic for flu can also help protect your patients and healthcare workers from COVID-19:

Before Patients Arrive



• **Prepare the clinic.**

- Know which of your patients are at higher risk of adverse outcomes from COVID-19.
- Consider and plan for providing more telemedicine appointments.
- Know how to contact your health department.
- Stay connected with your health department to know about COVID-19 in your community. Step up precautions when the virus is spreading in your community.
- Assess and restock supplies now and on a regular schedule.



• **Communicate with patients.**

- Ask patients about symptoms during reminder calls.
- Consider rescheduling non-urgent appointments.
- Post signs at entrances and in waiting areas about prevention actions.



• **Prepare the waiting area and patient rooms.**

- Provide supplies—tissues, alcohol-based hand rub, soap at sinks, and trash cans.
- Place chairs 3–6 feet apart, when possible. Use barriers (like screens), if possible.
- If your office has toys, reading materials, or other communal objects, remove them or clean them regularly.

When Patients Arrive



• **Place staff at the entrance to ask patients about their symptoms.**

- Provide symptomatic patients with tissues or facemasks to cover mouth and nose.
- Limit non-patient visitors.



• **Separate sick patients with symptoms.**

- Allow patients to wait outside or in the car if they are medically able.
- Create separate spaces in waiting areas for sick and well patients.
- Place sick patients in a private room as quickly as possible.

After Patients are Assessed



• **After patients leave, clean frequently touched surfaces** using EPA-registered disinfectants—counters, beds, seating.

• **Provide at-home care instructions** to patients with respiratory symptoms. Consider telehealth options for follow up.

• **Notify your health department** of patients with COVID-19 symptoms.



Train and prepare your staff now

- Ensure that clinical staff know the right ways to put on, use, and take off PPE safely.
- Recognize the symptoms of COVID-19—fever, cough, shortness of breath.
- Implement procedures to quickly triage and separate sick patients.

- Emphasize hand hygiene and cough etiquette for everyone.
- Ask staff to stay home if they are sick.
- Send staff home if they develop symptoms while at work.



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For more information: www.cdc.gov/COVID19

Attachment 6. Helpful Internet Resources

General Information & Patient Communication Resources:

CDC FAQs: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/faq.html>

CDC Fact Sheets: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/communication/factsheets.html>

Information for Exposed Patients: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/steps-when-sick.html>

Information for preparing Households for COVID-19: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/home/get-your-household-ready-for-COVID-19.html>

WHO COVID-19 Advice for the Public: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public>

What is COVID-19 One-pager: <https://asm.org/ASM/media/Press-Releases/2019/COVID-19-One-Pager-Global.pdf>

Practice Preparation:

CDC Steps to prepare healthcare facilities: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/healthcare-facilities/steps-to-prepare.html>

WHO guides on preventing the spread of COVID-19 in your practice/facility:

<https://iris.wpro.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665.1/14482/COVID-19-022020.pdf>

Personal Protection Equipment:

CDC Recommended Infection Prevention & Control Practices: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/infection-control/control-recommendations.html>

PPE Use Recommendations & Supply Chain Advice: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/healthcare-supply-ppe.html>

Strategies for Optimizing the Supply of N95 Respirators: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/respirators-strategy/index.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fhcp%2Frespirator-supply-strategies.html

WHO Guidance on rational use of PPE: https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/331215/WHO-2019-nCov-IPCPPE_use-2020.1-eng.pdf

What to do if you have been exposed:

CDC Guidance for exposed healthcare workers: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/guidance-risk-assesment-hcp.html>

Diagnosing Patients:

Criteria for testing & accessing testing: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/clinical-criteria.html>

IDSA Testing Resources: <https://www.idsociety.org/globalassets/idsa/public-health/covid-19-idsa-testing-intro.pdf>

Managing Patients Diagnosed with COVID-19

WHO Patient Management Technical Guidance: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/technical-guidance/patient-management>

CDC Management Guidance: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/clinical-guidance-management-patients.html>

Reporting a Suspected COVID-19 Case:

Find your state health department contact: <https://www.cste.org/page/EpiOnCall>

Coronavirus Education Resources:

Accredited Continuing Education Activities about Coronavirus: <https://www.accme.org/coronavirus-resources>

NEJM COVID-19 Resources: <https://www.nejm.org/coronavirus>

The Lancet COVID-19 Resource Center: https://www.thelancet.com/coronavirus?dgcid=etoc-edschoice_email_tlcoronavirus20

John Hopkins Map of Coronavirus Global cases:

<https://www.arcgis.com/apps/opsdashboard/index.html#/bda7594740fd40299423467b48e9ecf6>