



Emergency Medical Services Agency

Bulletin 2020-07

April 08, 2020

URGENT

PLEASE POST

PREPARING FOR AND RESPONDING TO KNOWN OR SUSPECTED COVID-19 PATIENTS

This bulletin is an update to Bulletin 2020-07 dated April 03, 2020

This bulletin provides information regarding the Emergency Medical Services (EMS) response and guidance for EMS field personnel responding to emergencies during the novel coronavirus infectious disease (COVID-19) pandemic. The information included in this bulletin is the most up to date but may change rapidly in the coming days and weeks. The SLO County EMS Agency (EMS Agency) will provide updates as they become available. This bulletin will cover the following areas:

- Dispatch Procedures
- EMS Procedures
- Treatment and Transport
- Guidelines for EMS Personnel with Potential Exposure

The State of California EMS Authority has a [COVID-19 Resource Portal](https://ems.ca.gov/covid19) <https://ems.ca.gov/covid19>. It is recommended that all providers review and regularly check the site for updates.

DISPATCH PROCEDURES

If your agency uses Medical Priority Dispatch System (MPDS), please incorporate the following guidance to the **Difficulty Breathing** or **Sick/Unknown** MPDS cards.

Screen Callers for Potential COVID-19

One or more of the following indications meets criteria for confirmed or suspected COVID-19 infection.

Complaint or suspicion of respiratory illness including cough, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing fever, or flu-like symptoms.

Dispatchers should also ask if patient has a positive COVID-19 diagnosis or had contact with someone diagnosed with COVID-19 within the past 14 days.

Notify EMS Personnel

Immediately notify responding EMS personnel if the patient meets criteria as a known or suspect COVID-19. In these cases, dispatchers will use the term “Meets Criteria” at the end of the dispatch.

EMS PROCEDURES

As this health crisis unfolds and new information regarding virus transmission is evaluated, we now recommend first responders place a mask on every patient as well as themselves when making close patient contact. Patients not “meeting criteria” and their immediate surroundings should still be considered a possible source of infection – including family members and bystanders

To help balance the concerns of PPE inventories and EMS responder concerns, a tiered approach to PPE use should be used.

For patients who “meet criteria” by dispatch or initial assessment, EMS Personnel making patient contact should don:

- N95 Respirator
- Full Face Shield or Reusable Goggles
- Gown
- Gloves

For all other patients, EMS Personnel making patient contact should don:

- Face mask (or N95 respirator if face mask not available)
- Eye protection
- Gloves

Refer to EMS Bulletin 2020-08 for definitions and descriptions of PPE.

The County of SLO Emergency Operations Center (EOC) is working on ways to mitigate the shortages of PPE. Information will be sent out as it becomes available.

- Refer to your agency guidelines for disinfecting and reuse of PPE
- Guidelines for donning and doffing PPE:
<https://www.cdc.gov/hai/pdfs/ppe/PPE-Sequence.pdf>

The intent of the following guidelines is to limit the number of EMS responders exposed to potential Covid-19 patients and preserve PPE. These precautions should be followed when possible until the Covid-19 threat to the EMS system has subsided.

- **A single responder should perform initial assessment of all patients from at least six feet away when possible.**
- **When the ambulance arrives on scene first, or at the same time as a fire agency, the ambulance Paramedic should make initial patient contact, wearing appropriate PPE, to assess the patient and determine the need for additional personnel. If an ambulance is not on scene, one member of the fire agency should don appropriate PPE and make initial patient contact.**
- **The person making initial patient contact should place a face mask (not N-95 unless it is the only available mask) on all patients immediately.** Other responding personnel should remain away from the patient (at least 6 ft) with their **PPE ready to don** if they are needed for patient care.
 - Oxygen may be administered with a nasal cannula under a face mask, or by oxygen mask with higher concentrations if needed. Oxygen saturation values in Covid 19 infected patients may present and remain lower than expected even with oxygen administration. Oxygen should be **titrated** according to patient's clinical presentation of respiratory distress as well as sPO2 levels.

TREATMENT AND TRANSPORT

- **Limit treatment activities for patients unless the patient is unstable.**
- Exercise caution with aerosol generating treatments such as:
 - Continuous Positive Airway Pressure (CPAP)
 - Administration of nebulized medications
 - Suctioning
 - Endotracheal Intubation
- Refer to EMS Bulletin 2020-06 "GUIDELINES FOR AEROSOL GENERATING TREATMENTS AND PROCEDURES" for more information.
- If aerosol-generating procedures are required, use the minimum number of personnel to perform the procedure(s). Personnel performing treatment to suspected COVID-19 patients **must wear full PPE including gloves, N95 respirator, full face shield / goggles and gown during patient contact.**
- If possible, the rear doors of the transport vehicle should be opened, and the HVAC system should be activated during aerosol-generating procedures. This should be done away from pedestrian traffic.
- During transport, vehicle ventilation in both compartments should be in non-recirculated mode. Use vehicle ventilation systems to maximize air changes.
- If the transport vehicle does not have an isolated driver's compartment, the driver should remove the face shield or goggles, gown and gloves and perform hand hygiene. A respirator (N95) should continue to be used during transport.
- Family members and other contacts of patients should be discouraged from riding in the ambulance when possible. If transporting family members or contacts is

necessary, evaluate them for the presence of respiratory illness indicating suspected COVID-19 and have them wear a face mask.

- Transport personnel shall provide an early notification to the receiving hospital of a suspect COVID-19 patient “meeting criteria”, including inter-facility transfers. Early notification will enable the receiving hospital to take appropriate infection control precautions prior to patient arrival. Hospitals may provide specific directions for patient arriving at their facility.
- Per SLO EMS Agency Policy #151, all hospitals in the County can currently receive a COVID-19 patient.

Documentation

In the narrative section of the patient care report (PCR) for each known or suspect COVID-19 patient, list each member of your agency, whether they had patient contact, and the list of PPE they wore. This documentation is the minimum required, nothing prevents any agency from adding data fields and closed call rules for PPE use in their PCR systems.

Cleaning and Disinfection

- Perform environmental cleaning and disinfection procedures of EMS transport vehicles and equipment
- Dispose of PPE in accordance with your agencies disposal policy.

REMAIN AT WORK GUIDELINES FOR EMS PERSONNEL WITH POTENTIAL EXPOSURE TO COVID-19

EMS responders who have had close contact with known or suspected COVID-19 patients and wore full PPE for the entirety of the contact, may remain at work without restriction. EMS providers who did not have close contact, with or without PPE, may also remain at work without restrictions.

Consistent with CDC recommendations prehospital care personnel that have experienced a low, medium, or high-risk exposure¹ to a COVID-19 positive patient and are asymptomatic should be allowed to remain at work. These personnel should still report temperature and absence of symptoms each day prior to starting work and should wear a facemask (surgical or N95) while at work for 14 days after the exposure. If these personnel develop even mild symptoms consistent with COVID-19, they must cease patient care activities, don a facemask (if not already wearing), and notify their supervisor or occupational health services prior to leaving work.

¹Interim U.S. Guidance for Risk Assessment and Public Health Management of Healthcare Personnel with Potential Exposure in a Healthcare Setting to Patients with Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19)

<https://ems.ca.gov/covid19>

- For questions regarding this Bulletin, please contact the EMS Division, County of SLO EOC at 805-788-2514.
- Check www.sloemsa.org for the latest guidance.

- Updated information about COVID-19 is available at www.slocounty.ca.gov/covid19 or at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>.
- Infection prevention and control recommendations is available at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/hcp/infection-control.html>.
- Additional information for healthcare personnel is available at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/guidance-hcp.html>