



COVID-19 Update

Monday, March 16, 2020

With more COVID-19 cases and deaths reported over the weekend, NYC Health + Hospitals is taking aggressive steps to ensure safe care to New Yorkers with the virus and protect the health and safety of our workforce.

We are moving to maximum strength and preparing our system to safely handle more cases and expand testing. We are also providing guidance and support to our dedicated employees as they step up to care for patients while managing the demands of personal life and family.

School Closures, Child Care

We recognize that the closure of schools may create additional burdens on staff who do not have alternative child care means. The City of New York is currently developing a plan which may provide an option for some staff. We will share those details as soon as they are available. In the meantime, staff are directed to seek approval for leave and, if granted, to use appropriate leave balances, other than sick leave, to cover time off related to child care. Employees who do not have sufficient leave balances may have leave advanced for this purpose. Employees should contact their supervisor and provide supporting documentation.

New Guidance on Use of Surgical Masks and N95 Respirators

- The NYC Department of Health issued new mandatory guidelines for all health care providers for the use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), specifically surgical masks and N95 respirators. The department has directed all providers to adopt the same PPE used for droplet and contact precautions. Under most circumstances, surgical masks will now be the acceptable PPE when caring for patients under investigation for COVID-19 or patients who are being treated for COVID-19. N95 respirators will continue to be required for aerosol generating procedures such as bronchoscopy, intubation or open endotracheal suctioning. Review the new policy [here](#).
- In order to protect front line staff who have close contact with patients who have not been evaluated, employees who work at entry points to clinical services, such as registration and triage, should always wear a surgical mask if they do not have a physical barrier between themselves and the patient.

Reducing the Burden and Preparing for a Possible Surge

- Effective immediately, NYC Health + Hospitals will temporarily postpone non-emergency, elective surgeries, as clinically appropriate.
- Hospitals are adopting more expeditious, safe discharge processes for hospitalized patients. This will allow us to have flexibility and align space and staff resources to manage the expected higher demand.
- All ambulatory care clinics will convert scheduled in-person visits to telephonic visits when possible. We will particularly focus on the elderly and patients who are at high risk in order to reduce their need to travel and exposure to coronavirus.

More Testing Sites

To create and increase capacity for evaluating and testing patients for COVID-19 for those who meet the criteria, we are standing up by-appointment-only COVID-19 Assessment and Testing Centers at 10 hospitals and 7 Gotham Health community-based health centers. Some facilities have already opened these testing sites and some will be set up in mobile outdoor tents.

These sites are for testing only, not for care or treatment of patients who test positive for COVID-19. At this moment, our COVID-19 Assessment and Testing Centers will serve patients by referral and appointment only. Patients with symptoms including fever (> 100.4 F) or cough or shortness of breath or sore throat should be directed to call the NYC Health + Hospitals Contact Center at 1-844-NYC-4NYC. If they meet testing criteria, they will be scheduled for an appointment.

How to Access Testing

It's important to help New Yorkers who suspect they have COVID-19 to understand how and when to seek testing. The first point of advice: avoid walking into the Emergency Room or the doctor's office. Share this simple guidance in [English](#) and [Spanish](#) to help our patients, family, neighbors and friends understand how to access testing for COVID-19. If you have questions, write to us at COVID-19Readiness@nychhc.org – our Special Pathogens and Emergency Response colleagues will be available to help.

Other resources:

[Video Message from Mitch](#) - From March 13, 2020

[NYC Health + Hospitals COVID-19 Guidance & Resources](#)

[NYC Department of Health](#)

[Centers for Disease Control](#)

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