



UTSW/Parkland BioTel EMS ALERT

March 12, 2020

EMS ALERT 20-005 Update #5 on “COVID-19”

Purpose: To provide **important, EMS-relevant, updated** guidance on: recognition; infection prevention and control measures; and patient management for “COVID-19” illness, **which is now present in our community.**

Background: Refer to previous EMS Alerts ([20-001](#), [20-002](#), [20-003](#) and [20-004](#)) for background information.

COVID-19 illness can range from mild, “cold-like” symptoms to fever+cough+shortness of breath, to pneumonia, sepsis, respiratory failure, organ failure and death, especially in elderly & immunocompromised individuals. There is no specific treatment or vaccine at this time.

The global situation changes almost hourly. The BioTel EMS System guidance below adheres to the current, expert, official recommendations from the US CDC, TX DSHS, and DCHHS. **New content is in blue font.**

UPDATED Action Items for EMS Professionals:

1. **Refer frequently to official information sources on the next page[†] for specific guidance.**
2. **Use PPE:** If your patient exhibits fever, cough or shortness of breath, place a surgical mask on the patient **AND** initiate standard, contact and airborne precautions for yourself and your crew members (gloves, gown and N95 respirator) WITH eye protection (goggles or face shield):
 - a. Especially for aerosol-generating procedures, e.g. **BVM ventilation, suctioning, intubation, nebulized medications, and/or CPAP.**
 - b. Use extreme care when **removing (doffing) PPE**, in order to avoid inadvertently touching your mucous membranes (eyes, nose, mouth) with contaminated gloves or unwashed hands.
 - c. **Use meticulous hand hygiene** (soap & water preferred) after any patient contact.
3. **Obtain a detailed travel history from all persons (regardless of ethnicity).**
4. **Notify BioTel if your patient meets the following criteria for exposure AND signs/symptoms*:** (BioTel will then notify the receiving hospital and the Dallas County Health Department.)

In the past 14 days since first onset of symptoms, your patient (including a healthcare worker²) has a history of EITHER:		
Travel to any of the affected countries¹ (¹ China, Iran, Italy, Japan, South Korea) OR to US regions with high disease activity and community spread (see HERE)	← OR →	Close contact³ with a laboratory- confirmed⁴ case of COVID-19
AND your patient has:		
Fever⁵ OR signs/symptoms of a lower respiratory illness (e.g. cough or shortness of breath)		

*NOTE: A person meeting these criteria may NOT have COVID-19, but s/he should be evaluated in consultation with the Dallas County Health Department as a possible PUI (Person Under Investigation).

- Consider notifying BioTel for any ill patient with a history of travel from the affected international¹ or US areas, or who has had close contact³ with a confirmed COVID-19 case⁴ within the past 14 days.
- 5. **Disinfect and decontaminate equipment and apparatus surfaces according to standard, agency-specific procedures** after every patient encounter and as needed, using an EPA-registered disinfectant labeled for effectiveness against “Human Coronavirus”. (See [HERE](#) and [HERE](#).)

[1Affected countries: China, Iran, Italy, Japan, South Korea; & U.S. regions \[CDC, 03/11/2020\]](#)

²For healthcare personnel, testing may be considered if there has been exposure to a person with suspected COVID-19 without laboratory confirmation. [CDC, [03/11/2020](#)]

³Close contact is defined as being within ~6 feet, or within the same room or care area, of a patient with COVID-19 for a prolonged period of time while not wearing recommended personal protective equipment (e.g., gowns, gloves, NIOSH-certified disposable N95 respirator, and eye protection), including living with, visiting, or sharing a healthcare waiting area, OR having direct contact with infectious secretions of a COVID-19 case (e.g. being coughed on) while not wearing recommended personal protective equipment. For more information on close contact definitions, refer to the CDC resources below. [CDC, [03/11/2020](#)]

⁴Documentation of laboratory-confirmation of COVID-19 may not be possible for travelers or persons caring for COVID-19 patients in other countries. [CDC, [03/11/2020](#)]

⁵Fever may be either subjective or confirmed. NOTE: Fever may not be present in some patients, such as those who are very young or elderly, immunosuppressed, or taking certain fever-lowering medications. Good clinical judgment should be used to guide testing of these patients. [CDC, [03/11/2020](#)]

Check back frequently at these sources for the latest, updated guidance

[†Links & QR Codes to Interim Guidance \(links accessed 03/11/2020\)](#)

<p>EMS Interim Guidance (CDC)</p> 	<p>Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) Guidance (CDC)</p> 
<p>COVID-19 PPE Instructional Video (NETEC) UPDATED 02/19/2020</p> 	<p>Infection Control Interim Guidance (CDC)</p> 
<p>Main COVID-19 Web Page (CDC)</p> 	

The current exposure risk for the public and for EMS Professionals in Texas remains low. Implementing the best-available guidance now will help to keep us all safe, as the situation changes.

UTSW/Parkland BioTel EMS Professionals may contact BioTel or the [EMS Medical Direction Team](#) at any time with questions or concerns about this EMS Alert