



**NORTHWEST
COMMUNITY
EMERGENCY
MEDICAL
SERVICES
SYSTEM**

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Date: February 7, 2020

System Memo: #382

To: All System members

Please POST IMMEDIATELY

From: Matthew T. Jordan, MD, FACEP
EMS Medical Director

Connie J. Mattera, MS, RN, PM
EMS Administrative Director

RE: **Coronavirus precautions and HIPAA Basics**

URGENT INFO to SHARE IMMEDIATELY!

Situation	<p>We are following this year's influenza numbers and particularly the Coronavirus information daily (sometimes hourly). We understand your concerns about potential risks and transmission to EMS personnel and are available 24/7 to answer your questions.</p> <p>OUR PRIME CONCERN is for the health, safety, and welfare of our personnel.</p> <p>This is coupled with the need to provide each patient with excellent care and protect their right to privacy under HIPAA legislation.</p> <p>CDC and IDPH alerts and practice recommendations have been posted to the System website on the home page under breaking news.</p> <p>Dispatchers have been given updated cards to ask about travel and the EMS Image Trend software has been modified to ask about travel if the patient has a fever and respiratory signs or symptoms.</p> <p>Guidelines for EMS barrier precautions and general steps to take to prevent disease transmission have been issued and discussed with System leaders. We are at far greater risk of exposure to influenza than the Corona virus and know to use appropriate precautions on all patients.</p>
ACTION NEEDED NOW	<p>While the news can be alarming, our response is simple and known:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ If a pt has a fever and respiratory S&S – take appropriate precautions▪ Ask if they have traveled within the last month▪ Try to stay at least 6 feet from them until you can put on a mask (N95), gloves and eye protection - Then put a surgical mask on the patient.▪ These viruses are mostly transmitted on our hands and things we touch. Hand hygiene is critically important. <p>Please make sure that EMS personnel have been fit tested for N95 masks.</p> <p>Companies are rapidly running out of personal protective equipment, so please take stock of your gloves, gowns, surgical and N95 masks and face shields and take all possible steps to have adequate inventories on hand.</p> <p>What does need a cliff notes reminder right now is our obligations under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) with respect to sharing protected healthcare information (PHI). Please see the attached for the few simple steps we need all healthcare workers to follow.</p>

IDPH in coordination with the Illinois Poison Control Center have launched the Illinois Novel Coronavirus Hotline and email address to answer questions Local Health Departments, clinicians, and the general public may have regarding the 2019 novel Coronavirus. The hotline and email address were created to provide consistent information, answer questions, share facts about symptoms, and provide up-to-date information from the CDC. Illinoisans can dial 1-800-889-3931 24/7 or email DPH.SICK@ILLINOIS.GOV to get questions answered.



HIPAA BASICS

February 2020

All healthcare workers must protect a patient's identity and healthcare information (PHI) at all times. When EMS responds to any patient, they must have confidence that their PHI will remain **confidential in all places and spaces** unless we are authorized by law to share information on a minimum necessary and need to know basis to do our job.

The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) states that identifying patient information that is gathered in anticipation of, during, and/or after care or treatment is protected.

PHI is written, electronic and oral communication that includes, but is not limited to a person's:

- Name, address, email address; phone numbers
- Social security number; age; date of birth
- Diagnosis, medical history; medications; test results

HIPAA allows the access or disclosure of PHI for Treatment; Payment; & Operations (care & QI)

Prohibited under HIPAA

If not needed to do your work, **do not look up the medical records of:**

- Family members, friends; coworkers
- Persons highlighted in news stories; celebrities, public officials, etc...
- Patients that you did not care for or ones where your name is not on the PCR unless conducting official CQI activities for your agency.

HIPAA breach involving spoken PHI

- Sharing PHI in a manner that can be heard by others who do not have a need to know
- Leaving patient information on voicemail without prior authorization

Do not discuss PHI (unless it is the minimum necessary to perform your work) in:

- Any EMS spaces includes the ambulance quarters
- In hospital corridors, chart rooms, elevators, break rooms, or within hearing of anyone that does not have the need to know.
- Public spaces or at home

HIPAA breach involving written or electronic PHI

- Transmitting ePHI in an unlawful manner using the Internet and/or text messages
- Saving PHI on portable devices that are not encrypted
- Faxing PHI to the incorrect number
- Identifying a pt by name, address or diagnosis in agency alerts, emails, or postings
- SHARING ANY PATIENT INFORMATION ON SOCIAL MEDIA SITES

Consequences of wrongful disclosure of PHI may include:

- Disciplinary action: Up to, and including, suspension of your EMS license
- Government enforcement

Wrongful disclosure of information: \$50,000+ per violation and/or one year in prison

Criminal penalties for obtaining information as a result of misrepresentation or lying: \$100,000 and/or prison for up to five years

Intent to sell information: \$250,000 and up to 10 years in prison.

HIPAA violations are reported to those impacted, government agencies and, when required, the general public. **Claiming lack of knowledge is not a defense to a HIPAA violation allegation.**

If you have any questions, please contact Dr. Jordan at MJordan@nch.org or Connie Mattera at cmattera@nch.org.