



**NORTHWEST  
COMMUNITY  
EMERGENCY  
MEDICAL  
SERVICES  
SYSTEM**

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Date: February 29, 2020

**System Memo: #383**

To: All System members

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

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

RE: **New Illinois Covid-19 case**

**URGENT INFO to DISTRIBUTE IMMEDIATELY**

**Situation**

You may have heard, and the attached SIREN alert from IDPH affirms, that a new person under investigation (PUI) has been hospitalized with possible Covid-19 infection in Illinois.

**This patient DID NOT access or use EMS for transport to the hospital.**

**ACTION  
NEEDED  
NOW**

**CDC and IDPH alerts** and practice recommendations have been posted to the System website on an ongoing basis under breaking news.

**Guidelines for EMS precautions have been issued, are posted,** and have been discussed with System leaders.

Please let us know if you have any questions about them.

**Our request of you remains simple and known:**

Use appropriate precautions on all patients.

- 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 EMS responders put on an N95 mask, gloves and eye protection.
- Put a surgical mask on the patient.
- These viruses are mostly transmitted on our hands and things we touch. For example, do not touch your face or the outside of your mask with contaminated hands. **Hand hygiene is critically important.**

**Ensure that EMS personnel have been fit tested for N95 masks.**

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 for responders.

Please also remind everyone again about our obligations under the **Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA)** with respect to accessing and sharing protected healthcare information (PHI).



# 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](mailto:MJordan@nch.org) or Connie Mattera at [cmattera@nch.org](mailto:cmattera@nch.org).