

# COVID-19 SUGGESTED OFFICE SAFETY PRACTICES

## INTRODUCTION

We understand the profound concern you hold for the well-being of your personnel, your patients, and your practice as you provide care through this pandemic. Included here are some suggestions to help reduce the risk to your practice, your patients, and others by the implementation of general safety protocols. Since every office is set up differently it would be impossible to come up with one set of guidelines that would apply to all office settings. We are providing you with the enclosed list of protocols to consider when you tailor your office's plan for operating during this COVID-19 pandemic.

Safety is a team effort, so please be sure to engage with your staff about effective sanitation, disinfection, personal hygiene, and preserving a safe office environment. We also recommend maintaining detailed documentation of your COVID-19 safety protocols in case an inquiry about your precautionary measures arises in the future. Of course, you should follow any national, state, or local rules and regulations related to operating during the COVID-19 pandemic.

We continue to work diligently to support our members through the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. For the most current information, we recommend reviewing the Healthcare Professionals guidance offered by the Center for Disease Control (CDC). That information is accessible at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/hcp/index.html>. For specific inquiries regarding your practice or specialty, please seek the counsel of a licensed attorney qualified to offer advice in your state.

As the COVID-19 research and findings evolve, so will the standards of safety expected of Practitioners. As such, implementing these practices early will ensure all precautions are taken to minimize risk and maximize protection of our Practitioners, Personnel, and Patients. Be safe, be well, and thank you for your continuing commitment to the well-being of your patients.

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## PATIENT INTERACTIONS

- **Pre-Screening:** Ask the Patient during appointment reminder calls if they are suffering from any COVID-19 symptoms such as fever, shortness of breath, dry cough, runny nose, sore throat, or loss of taste or smell. Reschedule the Patient's appointment for a later date if they are exhibiting any respiratory symptoms, or symptoms which could be attributable to COVID-19. You may also want to ask the patient about any international or domestic travel within the last 14 days. You may want to remind patients at this time of any new office protocols, such as whether you are permitting any non-patients to accompany patients into the office.
- **Re-scheduling:** Encourage Patients to be forthcoming about their health condition by eliminating penalties for last-minute cancellations or missed appointments. Even mildly ill patients should be encouraged to stay home and contact their physician for further guidance.
- **Check-In Practices:** Each Patient and Personnel member should sanitize their hands prior to participating in check-in procedures.
  - Ensure each Patient (and accompanying Non-Patient) is wearing a mask while interacting with check-in Office staff.
  - Measure the temperature of each Patient and Non-Patient with a contact-less thermometer at check-in.
  - Sanitize all commonly-used objects such as clipboards, pens, smart screens following each check-in.
- **Passive Patient Screening:** Screen Patients for COVID-19 symptoms, or symptoms of respiratory illness, before the Patient enters the treatment area. If a Patient presents with suspected symptoms of COVID-19, or respiratory illness, isolate them immediately, provide a mask (if one is not in use), and consult county health department guidelines to refer the Patient to an appropriate treatment site.
- **Active Patient Screening:** Question the Patient about recent travel and potential exposure to COVID-19. Further question the Patient about whether they are suffering from a cough, respiratory symptoms, or any other COVID-19 symptoms. Document the Patient's chart with notes describing the questioning to show you have diligently screened each Patient.
- **COVID-19 Risk Informed Consent:** Ensure each Patient reviews, initials, and signs the *COVID-19 Risk Informed Consent*. To reduce waiting room crowding, e-mail intake documentation, including the COVID-19 Risk Informed Consent, to patients so they can bring completed forms to their appointment.
- **Scheduling & Payments:** When possible, appointment scheduling should be done online, via text message or over the phone. Process payments using a contact-free method, e.g., send invoices via e-mail with an option to pay online. If Patients are unable to pay online, invoices should be mailed to a verified address and payment should be accepted via mail. Consider eliminating late payment penalties for pay-by-mail options. If a Patient insists on using cash, presume it is contaminated and place the cash in a separate envelope for decontamination. Cash change should not be provided at time of payment. If the Patient has underpaid, bill the remaining amount electronically. If the Patient has overpaid with cash, provide the option to credit the Patient's account with the overage; or, advise the Patient of mail or electronic methods to remit the difference.

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## COMMON AREA SAFETY

- **Waiting Room:** Avoid having multiple patients in the Office waiting room. This may mean spacing appointments further apart. You may want to have patients call or text when they arrive and then wait in their cars until they receive a text or call from your Office indicating that it is their turn.
- **COVID-19 Signage:** Post signs outside of Office entrance door describing potential COVID-19 symptoms. Include your Office contact information on the exterior sign so the Patient can reschedule the appointment without entering if they are exhibiting symptoms.
- **Facemasks:** Provide supplies such as facemasks, alcohol-based sanitizer, hand soap, and tissue to Patients at Office entry
- **Spacing:** Place chairs at least 6 feet apart, if possible.
- **Communal Objects:** Remove communal objects such as reading materials, toys, and remote controls. If items must remain, clean them thoroughly several times a day.
- **Visitors:** Counsel adult Patients to attend their appointments alone, if possible. Limit non-patient presence in the office. If a non-patient individual accompanies a patient, inform them that they are required to wear a mask and have their temperature checked.
- **Public Health Notifications:** Diligently monitor the COVID-19 infection rate in your local community. Continue evolving your safety protocols consistent with CDC guidelines, as well as those of your state and local public health agencies.

## FACILITY SAFETY

- **Surface Sanitization Practices – Work Stations:** Encourage regular sanitization of work stations by making cleaning products and sanitizing wipes available to all employees.
- **Surface Sanitization Practices – Patient Areas:** Disinfect all Patient areas between Patient appointments. In addition to treatment tables, all therapeutic equipment, counter tops, chairs, door handles, clipboards, and garment hooks should be disinfected prior to and following each treatment. Consider steam-mopping office floors daily.
- **Social Distancing:** Ensure premises floor is clearly marked with brightly-colored markers to indicate 6 feet of distance in areas where individuals may congregate.
- **Daily Disinfection:** Ensure the Office is disinfected prior to opening and after closing on a daily basis. Encourage and compensate Personnel to arrive early to ensure disinfection is complete prior to Office opening.
- **Food & Drink:** Consider prohibiting food and drink in the office. Discontinue serving water, tea, coffee, or any other food or drink to Patients.

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## **PERSONNEL AND PRACTITIONER SAFETY**

- **Staff Pre-Screening:** Conduct pre-screening of staff at the beginning of the shift. Assess suspicious symptoms and send the staff member home if any COVID-19 related symptoms are present.
- **Protect Personnel:** Ensure all Office personnel who come in close contact with Patients wear appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) such as facemasks, eye protection, and gloves. When possible, install barriers to limit contact with Patients.
- **PPE Protocols:** Ensure Personnel is aware of PPE safety practices, including discarding gloves after use and starting each treatment with fresh PPE supplies.
- **Inventory of PPE:** Conduct regular inventory of PPE supply to ensure availability to all members of the staff.
- **Personal Hygiene Practices:** Mandate effective hand hygiene by ensuring the staff has access to alcohol-based sanitizer as well as hand soap and water. Providers should wash their hands and/or sanitize before and after each treatment.
- **Enforce Social Distancing:** To the extent possible, allow for a minimum of 6 feet of space between Personnel while inside the Office.
- **Remote Employment:** Set up remote employment for staff who perform administrative or non-patient care tasks (i.e., billing, appointment confirmations, follow-up telephone calls) to reduce unnecessary exposure in the Office.
- **Sick Leave:** Personnel who develop suspected COVID-19 symptoms, or any respiratory-related symptoms, should be instructed not to report to work. Ensure your sick leave policies are flexible and consistent with public health guidance; and, that employees are aware of these policies.