



What you need to know

As a result of the COVID-19 outbreak, there have been several changes implemented which effect your practice.

1) Harris County has issued a stay at home order which will last until April 30. Only essential businesses can stay open. According to the order physicians and their staffs are considered essential.

- The TMA has created a [letter](#) for physicians and their staff to use to ensure they can get to work.

2) Screen every patient visit over the phone PRIOR to any in-person (CMS 3/9/2020):

- Do you have fever, cough, sore throat, or difficulty breathing?
- Have you had contact with someone with known or suspected COVID-19?
- Do you live in a community with confirmed ongoing transmission of COVID-19?
- Have you traveled within the last 14 days to any location with confirmed ongoing transmission of COVID-19?

3) If you have a patient in your office you feel should be investigated further -- place a facemask on the patient; isolate the patient in a private room or separate area; wear appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE).

- If you do not have PPE and the patient is mildly symptomatic, send them home. If they are displaying severe symptoms, send them to a hospital or drive-thru testing facility. If you do not have PPE and the patient is not symptomatic but does meet other criteria, contact the local health department (see contact information below) for further guidance.

- COVID-19 is a REPORT IMMEDIATELY notifiable condition in Texas. [See notice to providers.](#)

4) Harris County Public Health has provided [guidance](#) on who should be tested:

- Have had close contact** with someone diagnosed with COVID-19
- Have other health conditions (diabetes, lung disease, heart disease, pregnancy)
- Are age 60 and older
- Are residents of nursing homes
- Part of an investigation of a cluster or an outbreak
- Are Healthcare workers/First responders

5) CDC has issued new guidance on [testing priorities](#).

Priority 1. Hospitalized patients and Healthcare facility workers with symptoms.

Priority 2. Patients in long-term care facilities with symptoms; Patients 60 years of age and older with symptoms; Patients with underlying conditions with symptoms; First responders with symptoms.

Priority 3. Critical infrastructure workers with symptoms; Individuals who do not meet any of the above categories with symptoms; Healthcare facility workers and first responders; Individuals with mild symptoms in communities experiencing high numbers of COVID-19 hospitalizations.

Non-priority. Individuals without symptoms.

6) If physicians have a suspected COVID-19 patient, contact the local health department (see contact information below). The health department will coordinate the investigation and inform you of next steps and provide approval of the testing request based on the [DSHS Criteria to Guide Testing of PUIs for COVID-19](#). Physicians can also direct their patients to www.readyharris.org to use the self-assessment tool. [Commercial testing sites](#) are available.

7) Quest Diagnostics, Lab Corp, Mayo Clinic Labs, ARUP Labs or CPL are processing samples for COVID-19. One cannot go to any of the community labs for testing. They are only accepting samples from healthcare professionals,

8) After consultation with the local health department, determine if the patient should be sent home. If the patient is sent home, advise them to stay home except to get medical care. For additional guidance, check out the CDC guidelines for [when you are sick](#).

9) Providers should consider additional possible causes of the illness, including the flu, while waiting on the results.

10) There are no known treatments for COVID-19. However, there are [FDA approved drugs](#) which are being tested for treating the virus. [Serious illnesses](#) have been reported after the use of non-pharmaceutical chloroquine phosphate to prevent and treat COVID-19.

11) The Texas Department of State Health Services has [developed new guidance](#) for releasing a patient from in-home isolation.

12) Healthcare workers and patients need to practice routine infection control; handwashing, covering coughs, staying home when ill, and using PPE. See [CDC guidance on PPE](#). If you do not have PPE or have limited PPE, then see the [CDC's infection control FAQs](#).

13) If hospitals and healthcare professionals cannot obtain any PPE from their vendor(s) and have exhausted all alternative options, they should send their official requests to their local office of emergency management via the State of Texas Assistance Request (STAR) process. Go to <https://www.readyharris.org/contact> to contact your local Emergency Management Office (EMO).

14) HCMS has developed information on using [telemedicine](#) in the wake of COVID-19. Including payment and information on how to initiate telemedicine.

If you have questions, concerns or feedback, contact us at webadmin@hcms.org.

15) The [Texas Medical Board](#) has issued waivers and guidance on issues surrounding non-essential surgeries, telemedicine, license renewal extensions and more.

Additional Contact Information

- Outside of the City of Houston
 - [Harris County Public Health](#) 832-927-7575 option 2
- Within the City of Houston
 - [Houston Health Department](#) (832) 393-5080; After Hours: (832) 393-5080

For additional information, click on the links below:

[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)

[Texas Department of State Health Services](#)

[TMA COVID-19 Resources Page](#)

[Harris County Medical Society](#)

If you have questions, concerns or feedback, contact us at webadmin@hcms.org.

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