



## What you need to know

HCMS physician leaders are in regular contact with Dr. Umair Shah, the Executive Director of Harris County Public Health and Dr. David Persse, Medical Director of Houston Health Department to discuss the specific COVID-19 information that practicing physicians need to know now.

Here are some guidelines for your practice:

- 1) Tell your patients they must call before coming to your office.
- 2) Screen every patient visit over the phone PRIOR to any in-person (CMS 3/9/2020):
  - a. Do you have fever, cough, sore throat, or difficulty breathing?
  - b. Have you had contact with someone with known or suspected COVID-19?
  - c. Do you live in a community with confirmed ongoing transmission of COVID-19?
  - d. Have you traveled within the last 14 days to any location either domestically or internationally 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).
  - a. 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.
  - b. COVID-19 is a REPORT IMMEDIATELY notifiable condition in Texas. [See notice to providers.](#)
- 4) Patients 65 and older and patients with chronic illnesses and are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms can go thru the City drive thru testing facility. Patients can call the Houston Health Department's COVID-19 call center at 832-393-4220 between 9 a.m. and 7 p.m. to get screened. They will receive a unique identification code and instructions on where to go for testing. [Click here](#) for additional testing information.
- 5) If you are not using a commercial lab to process for COVID-19 samples, you need to;
  - a. Contact the local health department (see contact information below). The health department will coordinate the investigation and inform you of next steps, including the possible need to collect specimens to test for COVID-19 and provide approval of the testing request based on the [DSHS Criteria to Guide Testing of PUIs for COVID-19.](#)
- 6) Quest Diagnostics, Lab Corp, Mayo Clinic Labs, ARUP Labs and CPL are now processing samples for COVID-19. One cannot go to any of the community labs for testing. They are only accepting samples from healthcare professionals.
- 7) Providers should consider additional possible causes of the illness, including the flu, while waiting on the results.
- 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) 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.](#)
- 10) 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. Contact your local Emergency Management Office (EMO) at <https://www.readyharris.org/contact>.
- 11) For additional information, see the [TMA COVID-19 Resources Page.](#)

And please, realize that your patients are also subject to rumors, unfounded interpretation of news sources, and fear. You need to act as the concerned calm in the middle of the storm.

- 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](#)  
[Harris County Medical Society](#)

**If you have questions, concerns or feedback, contact us at [webadmin@hcms.org](mailto:webadmin@hcms.org).**