

CITY OF SAN ANTONIO

March 2, 2020

Dear Health Care Administrator:

Metro Health is taking steps to prevent the introduction and spread of [novel coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#) in our community. Long term care and residential facilities play a key role in this effort. You can help by sharing the information below with your staff and patients:

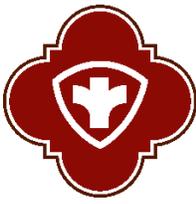
Maintain perspective. The United States has seen 16,000 deaths from influenza so far this flu season, compared to 1 from COVID-19 as of this writing. San Antonio has no identified cases of community transmission to date.

Take simple actions to slow the spread of respiratory infections and protect our community members who are at higher risk. While only 20% of people infected with COVID-19 become seriously ill, the elderly and those with underlying health conditions are the most seriously affected. Stay home when sick, wash your hands often, avoid touching your face, cover your cough with your arm or a tissue, and disinfect surfaces.

Fight misinformation. Avoid spreading the stigma that this is a disease limited to one type of people. Know that people released from quarantine or isolation do not pose a risk of infection to other people.

Additional information and guidance for long term and residential care facilities:

- Be prepared: If you have not already done so, update your Emergency Operations Plan. Update your Pandemic Response Plan—[guidance for pandemic influenza](#) remains generally applicable to COVID-19, except:
 - There is no vaccine or approved therapy for COVID-19.
 - The incubation period for COVID-19 ranges from 2-14 days.Your plan could include modifying group activities to maintain a 3-foot distance between individuals, and serving meals individually in rooms. Here is new guidance from the Society for Post-Acute Care and Long-Term Medicine: <https://paltc.org/sites/default/files/COVID-19-guidance.pdf>
- The Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) plans frequent updates to its [COVID-19 website](#) in the next two weeks, so check back daily.
- The CDC has guidance on optimizing PPE supply: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/healthcare-supply-ppe-index.html>
- Re-emphasize infection control and PPE training for all staff, including frequent handwashing.
- Know the symptoms of novel coronavirus infection: fever (100.4F or more) and a dry cough; not a runny nose, typically. Over time, shortness of breath. Only people who are seriously ill are eligible for COVID-19 testing at this time.



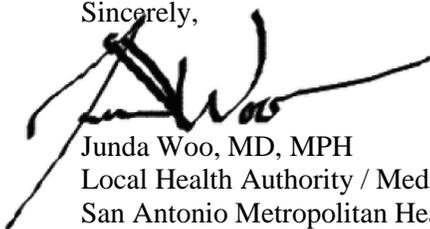
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- Actively encourage sick workers to stay home. Employees who become sick at work should be sent home as soon as possible. We encourage employers to offer paid sick leave. Promote telemedicine urgent care, if that is an option for your employees.
- Monitor and plan for absenteeism. Absenteeism may arise because of sick employees, because healthy employees are caretakers for sick family members, because parents stay home with their children during school closures, or because a staffer was in close contact with a sick person. We encourage facilities to cross-train staff in preparation for absenteeism and think about trigger points for suspending some services.
- Surge plans could include cohorting patients to limit the number of staff exposed to COVID-19 and to conserve PPE. Higher surge levels will bring ethical issues arising from the need to triage and conserve resources. The legal and [ethical framework](#) for these decisions should be considered well in advance of a crisis. Create criteria for use or denial of resource-intensive services using a Crisis Standards of Care framework. Surge plan and other resources: <https://asprtracie.hhs.gov/>.
- Disseminate culturally and linguistically appropriate information to employees about your preparedness and response plan. Include information about mental health support for staff.
- Employees planning to travel should review [CDC: Travel Health Notices](#) and keep an eye on the news. Employees who recently arrived from places other than the identified areas do not have any restrictions or need to seek health care unless they are sick.
- We are in cold and flu season. COVID-19 symptoms are similar to these more common infections—it is far more likely that anyone with respiratory symptoms is suffering from a cold or flu. Do not make determinations of risk based on race or country of origin.
- We know there may be specific situations that arise where you have questions. We encourage you to call us at **210-207-8876** (24 -7), so we can work together to determine the best course of action.

This is a rapidly evolving situation. For ongoing updates and additional resources, including posters and fact sheets in multiple languages, please visit: sanantonio.gov/Health/News/Alerts/CoronaVirus and dshs.texas.gov/coronavirus/. If you are receiving this letter by mail and would like an electronic copy with hyperlinks, just email me.

Thank you for serving our community, and for partnering with us for a healthy San Antonio.

Sincerely,



Junda Woo, MD, MPH
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San Antonio Metropolitan Health District

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