



## Department of Health

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DHCBS DAL: 20-08 Updated

### **Re: COVID-19 Guidance for Home Health Care Agencies and Hospice Providers**

This advisory supersedes the guidance from the New York State Department of Health (“the Department”) to certified home health agencies, long term home health care programs, hospices, and licensed home care services agencies pertaining to the current novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak that was released on March 14, 2020, DAL: DHCBS 20-08.

#### **Should my agency be screening patients upon admission?**

The Department strongly recommends that an agency ask screening questions regarding a prospective patient’s symptoms and exposure prior to accepting new admissions and referrals for care. The Department further strongly recommends that the agency communicate with the Local Health Department (LHD) where the patient resides to determine if any prospective patients are under mandatory quarantine or precautionary quarantine for possible COVID-19 infection before providing services to a new patient.

Prospective patients must be screened for the following symptoms and exposures. Persons screened and determined to be at high risk for COVID-19 should be referred to a health care provider for evaluation.

- (1) Signs or symptoms of a respiratory infection such as fever, cough, shortness of breath or sore throat; or
- (2) Persons who have had contact, in the last 14 days, with someone with a confirmed diagnosis of COVID-19, or under investigation for COVID-19, or are ill with respiratory illness.

#### **Should my agency be screening staff?**

Yes. Staff must be screened upon arriving at work. Since “arrival at work” often means arrival at the patient’s home, the Department is recommending that home care staff use the CDC guidance for health care personnel (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/guidance-risk-assessment>), and self-monitor for fever by taking their temperature twice a day and remain alert for respiratory symptoms (e.g., cough, shortness of breath, sore throat).

Agencies must have a policy in place to contact, on a daily basis, each employee prior to the employee beginning home care visits to confirm that the employee is self-monitoring and has no symptoms. Home care workers must also contact the agency if they develop symptoms during the workday and immediately cease visiting patients. Agencies must communicate to all home care workers that if they continue to work while symptomatic, they risk causing the continued spread of COVID-19.

In addition, agencies must have a plan in place to advise and refer staff to medical attention when they exhibit fever and/or respiratory symptoms. Staff who are symptomatic or report an elevated fever should be sent home and should contact their primary care physician as soon as possible. Further reporting to the Local Health Department should be carried out by the primary care physician.

In keeping with the Governor's Executive Order, it is recommended that agencies avoid having staff come to or congregate at agency offices. Recognizing that staff may need supplies and may pick up supplies at central distribution sites, the Department recommends that agencies develop a mechanism for distributing supplies in a manner that avoids staff congestion while protecting scarce patient care supplies.

The health and safety of healthcare workers and our ability to provide and support patient care remain our priorities. The situation with COVID-19 infections identified in the US continues to evolve and is rapidly changing. It is important for all agencies to keep apprised of current guidance by regularly visiting the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and NYSDOH websites, as well as the NYSDOH Health Commerce System (HCS), for the most up-to-date information for healthcare providers.

- CDC: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>
- NYSDOH: <https://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/coronavirus.htm>
- HCS: <https://commerce.health.state.ny.us>

Agency management must also keep their staff updated as the situation changes and should educate staff about the disease, its signs and symptoms and necessary infection control to protect themselves and their patients. The NYSDOH distributes alerts and advisories through the HCS notification system, and therefore it is key that providers maintain their up-to-date contact information in the HCS Communications Director.