

Interim Guidance for Home Health Care Workers (HHCW) during the COVID-19 Pandemic, April 21, 2020

Home health care workers (HHCW) may visit multiple patients daily, many of whom are vulnerable to serious complications of COVID-19 based on their age or medical conditions. HHCW are at risk for both acquiring COVID-19 from their patients and for transmitting it to their patients. Given community spread throughout Georgia, precautions must be taken to prevent transmission in the home health setting. The purpose of this document is to provide recommendations to reduce the risk of COVID-19 both for HHCW and their patients.

General recommendations:

HHCW should conduct social distancing whenever possible and wear a cloth face covering in public settings to reduce their chance of acquiring COVID-19. During the course of their work duties, they should:

- Monitor themselves for fever and COVID-19 symptoms daily.
- Stay home when they are sick or have a fever
- Make sure any medical supplies (i.e. thermometer, blood pressure cuff) are cleaned and disinfected between patients
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using a household disinfectant spray or wipe.
- Use alcohol-based hand rub between visits. When in a patient's home and hands are visibly soiled, they should wash their hands with soap and water.
- Use personal protective equipment as described below.

Personal protective equipment (PPE) use:

Use of PPE is important because a home health patient can become infected by coming into contact with an asymptomatic HHCW, and a HHCW could acquire COVID-19 through contact with a patient.

- The HHCW should always wear a surgical mask and gloves when in a patient's home. If these PPE are not available, HHCW should follow CDC protocols to optimize PPE: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/ppe-strategy/index.html>
- Gowns must be added for the following situations:
 - Performing an aerosol generating procedure (e.g., nebulizer therapy)
 - During care activities where splashes and sprays are anticipated

- During the following high-contact resident care activities: dressing, bathing/showering, transferring, providing hygiene, changing linens, changing briefs or assisting with toileting, device care or use, wound care
- For any contact with patients with symptoms suggestive of COVID-19 (see below) or known COVID-19 infection, HHCW must wear the following:
 - N95 respirator (or surgical mask if respirators are not available or healthcare personnel have not been fit tested); a respirator must be used if performing an aerosol-generating procedure (e.g., nebulizer treatment).
 - Eye protection (goggles or face shield). Any eye protection that is not immediately discarded after use must be dedicated to each HHCW
 - Gown
 - Gloves

Home health agencies should follow instructions received from their healthcare coalition or District health department to request supplies.

Patients with symptoms suggestive of COVID-19

HHCW should have a low threshold of suspicion for COVID-19 in their elderly patients. Elderly persons with COVID-19 may not show typical symptoms such as fever, cough, or shortness of breath. Atypical symptoms may include new or worsening malaise (general feeling of discomfort, illness, or uneasiness), new dizziness, diarrhea, or sore throat. Identification of these symptoms in a patient should prompt further evaluation for COVID-19.

The HHCW should contact the patient's medical provider for guidance if they suspect the patient might have COVID-19. Patients who are symptomatic should wear a surgical mask, if available, or a cloth covering, and be placed in a room isolated from other family members and pets while awaiting test results.

Information on caring for someone with COVID-19 at home is available at:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/care-for-someone.html>

Care plans

The HHCW should ask the patient, or a family member when appropriate, to keep a care plan easily accessible in case of emergency. A care plan summarizes the patient's health conditions, medications, healthcare providers, emergency contacts, and end-of-life care options such as advance directives.

Calling for help

HHW should follow their standard guidelines for calling for help. Specific COVID-19 symptoms that may warrant calling for emergency help (9-1-1) include:

- Trouble breathing
- Persistent pain or pressure in the chest

- New confusion or inability to arouse
- Bluish lips or face

This list is not all inclusive. A medical provider should be consulted for any other symptoms that are severe or concerning.

HHCW with possible COVID-19 exposure

Home health care workers with possible exposure to COVID-19 should be evaluated to assess exposure risk and self-isolate at home for 14 days if appropriate.

Home Health Agency policies

Home health care agencies should develop policies for coordination of HHCW daily monitoring, work restrictions, use of paid time off and continuance of wages that are consistent with ensuring the safety of their staff and of patients.