March 13, 2020

ILLINOIS HEALTH AND HOSPITAL ASSOCIATION
MEMORANDUM

TO: Chief Executive Officers, Member Hospitals and Health Systems
    Chief Operating Officers
    Chief Medical Officers
    Chief Nursing Officers
    Chief Quality Officers
    Emergency Preparedness Contacts
    Emergency Department Directors
    Behavioral Health Constituency Section
    Government Relations Personnel
    Public Relations Directors

FROM: A.J. Wilhelmi, President & CEO
      Keneatha Johnson, Director, Quality, Safety, and Health Policy

SUBJECT: IHA COVID-19 Update

To support hospitals and health systems in their ongoing efforts to prepare and care for patients potentially exposed to or diagnosed with COVID-19, IHA will continue providing updates on the latest developments, guidance and other important information about the novel coronavirus. We thank members for completing our COVID-19 Readiness Survey by today’s deadline. Over the past 10 days, we have received more than 140 responses. We will share the results with you early next week.

Information Request from IDPH and the Governor’s Office
The Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) and the Governor’s Office are seeking information from the hospital community on several key questions:
   1. Is your hospital conducting COVID-19 testing with a commercial laboratory or in your own lab?
   2. Is your hospital willing to serve as a mass COVID-19 testing site?
   3. Should the state establish designated COVID-treatment centers rather than have every hospital respond to COVID-19 cases?

Please click here to submit your responses.

Situational Awareness
This afternoon, President Donald Trump declared a national emergency concerning the COVID-19 crisis. The President says this will free up $50 billion in additional funding and allow the Department of Health and Human Services to waive certain regulations and laws to more quickly deliver testing and care for coronavirus patients. Reportedly, this includes a lifting of the restriction on the number of beds Critical Access Hospitals can use as well as a suspension of the 96-hour certification rule until further notice.
Also this afternoon, Governor J.B. Pritzker announced that all public and private schools in the state will be closed starting Tuesday, March 17, with classes to resume on Monday, March 30 due to the spread of COVID-19. As of this afternoon, Illinois has 46 positive/confirmed COVID-19 cases, an increase of 14 cases from Thursday.

Thursday evening, Governor J.B. Pritzker, in collaboration with Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot, released new guidance developed for residents to prevent further spread of COVID-19. These new precautionary measures were developed with large events and gatherings in mind, and will promote social distancing practices - a key recommendation to prevent community spread of the disease with the least disruption possible to people's daily lives.

**Coverage for COVID-19 Testing/Essential Health Benefits**

The Dept. of Healthcare and Family Services today issued a notice stating that the cost of COVID-19 laboratory testing is a covered service of the Illinois Medicaid program. A new Healthcare Common Procedure Coding System (HCPCS) code, U0002, became effective Feb. 4, for providers to bill for non-CDC laboratory COVID-19 (Novel Coronavirus) testing. This code will be added to the next update of the Department’s Practitioner Fee Schedule but a rate has not yet been assigned.

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) today released frequently asked questions (FAQs) on essential health benefits (EHB) coverage in response to the coronavirus outbreak. According to a CMS press release, the FAQs detail existing federal rules governing health coverage provided through the individual and small group insurance markets that apply to the diagnosis and treatment of COVID-19. The FAQs clarify which COVID-related services, including testing, isolation/quarantine, and vaccination, are generally currently covered as EHBs in these markets.

**Updated Testing Guidelines**

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has updated its guidelines for collection, handling, and testing clinical specimens from persons under investigation (PUIs) for COVID-19. The CDC now recommends including the combined nasopharyngeal swab and oropharyngeal swab (NP/OP swab) specimens as an option for the upper respiratory specimen collection. Testing authorization must be obtained before submitting a specimen. Approval can be obtained through a local health department or through the state Communicable Diseases Program staff. An IDPH Communicable Diseases Laboratory Test Requisition must accompany specimens. Patients with underlying co-morbidities are at higher risk for severe illness and mortality. Clinicians are strongly encouraged to test for other causes of respiratory illness, including infections such as influenza, prior to testing for SARS-CoV-2.

**EMTALA Requirements and COVID-19**

CMS this week released a new document related to COVID-19 and Emergency Medical Treatment and Labor Act (EMTALA) requirements. As part of its call to action for hospital Emergency Departments (EDs) to screen patients for COVID-19, CMS sent a memo to State Survey Agency directors that provides information concerning implications of COVID-19 for their compliance with EMTALA. It includes a question and answer document specific to EMTALA obligations and COVID-19, which emphasizes the importance of reliance on Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance regarding isolation and infection control measures. The document includes a fact sheet for addressing increased surges in the numbers of patients presenting to the ED, and establishes some latitude for hospitals and health systems to set up screening sites away from the ED.

**Updated CDC Interim Guidance on Healthcare Personnel (HCP)**

The CDC has updated its interim guidance regarding HCP contact tracing, monitoring, and work restrictions in selected circumstances. These include allowances for an asymptomatic HCP who has had
an exposure to a COVID-19 patient to continue to work after options to improve staffing have been exhausted and in consultation with their occupational health program.

**March 19 Webinar on Telehealth and COVID-19**
The National Consortium of Telehealth Resource Centers (NCTRC) is offering a special Telehealth and COVID-19 webinar March 19 from 1-2 p.m. CT. The webinar will explore telehealth uses and benefits during the COVID-19 outbreak. Register [here](#).

**Resources and Guidance**
- [IDPH webpage on COVID-19](#)
- CDC Homepage for Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)
- [Updated CDC Guidance on Evaluating and Testing Persons for Coronavirus Disease 2019](#)
- [Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19): Frequently Asked Questions](#)
- CDC Guidance for Healthcare Professionals
- CDC Guidance for Laboratories
- CDC Travel Guidance
- ASPR COVID-19 Healthcare Planning Checklist
- Chicago Department of Public Health COVID-19 webpage
- IHA webpage on COVID-19
- Coronavirus COVID-19 Global Cases by Johns Hopkins CSSE

As a reminder, IDPH is issuing updates and alerts on COVID-19 via the [State of Illinois Rapid Electronic Notification System (SIREN)](#), a secure web-based messaging and alerting system that leverages email, phone, text, pagers and other messaging formats to provide 24/7/365 notification, alerting, and flow of critical information. To register for SIREN, go to [https://siren.illinois.gov/agreement.php](https://siren.illinois.gov/agreement.php).

For other testing questions, additional information or other questions, please contact your local health department. If they are not available, please contact the IDPH Communicable Disease Section at 217-782-2016. If they cannot be reached, use the IDPH after hours number 800-782-7860. Local health departments should contact IDPH for consultations on Persons Under Investigation (PUIs).

If you have questions or comments, please contact Keneatha Johnson, Director, Quality, Safety, and Health Policy at 630-276-5415 or kjohnson@team-iha.org.