

March 25, 2020

Purpose: The Office for People With Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) is providing this document to assist Article 16 Clinics operated and/or certified by OPWDD in the prevention and management of the Coronavirus (also referred to as COVID-19). These guidelines are based on information made available by the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) and Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and are accurate as of the date written.

Guidance may change as more becomes known about COVID-19. Please visit the OPWDD website periodically for the most current information at:

<https://opwdd.ny.gov/coronavirus-guidance>

Article 16 Clinic Considerations

Based upon “Interim Infection Prevention and Control Recommendations for Patients with Confirmed Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) or Persons Under Investigation for COVID-19 in Healthcare Settings” by the CDC, the following guidance is applicable to all U.S. healthcare settings.

To Minimize Chance for Exposure, ensure facility policies and practices are in place to minimize exposures to respiratory pathogens that causes COVID-19. Measures should be implemented proactively, before individual’s arrival to the clinic, upon arrival, and throughout the duration of the affected individual’s presence in the clinic setting. Refer to the Centers for Disease Control for additional guidance:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/healthcare-facilities/guidance-hcf.html>

Develop a Plan - Actions to take now to prepare for an outbreak of COVID-19

1. Designate a time to meet with staff to educate them on COVID-19 and what they may need to do to prepare. The following may be useful resources to share information about COVID-19:
 - How [COVID-19 spreads](#)
 - [Clinical management](#) of COVID-19 patients
 - [Infection prevention and control](#) recommendations for COVID-19
2. Explore alternatives to face-to-face triage and visits. The following options can reduce unnecessary healthcare visits and prevent transmission of respiratory viruses in your facility:
 - Instruct individuals and/or their caregivers to use available advice lines, “patient portals”, telehealth, on-line self-assessment tools, or call and speak to an

- office/clinic staff if they become ill with symptoms such as fever, cough, or shortness of breath.
- Identify staff who are able to conduct telephonic and telehealth interactions with individuals and/or their caregivers. Develop protocols so that staff can triage and assess individuals quickly.
 - Determine algorithms to identify which individuals can be managed by telephone and advised to stay home, and which individuals will need to be sent for emergency care or come to the facility.
 - Instruct individuals and persons who accompany them that if they have respiratory symptoms they should call before they leave home, so staff at the clinic can be prepared to care for them when they arrive.
3. Plan to optimize the facility's supply of [personal protective equipment](#) in the event of shortages. Identify flexible mechanisms to procure additional supplies when needed.
4. Prepare the facility to safely triage and manage individuals with respiratory illness, including COVID-19. Become familiar with [infection prevention and control guidance](#) for managing COVID-19 patients.
- Visual alerts (signs, posters) at entrances and in strategic places providing instruction on hand hygiene, respiratory hygiene, and cough etiquette
 - Ensure supplies are available (tissues, waste receptacles, alcohol-based hand sanitizer)
 - Facemasks are available at triage for individuals with respiratory symptoms
 - Create an area for spatially separating individuals with respiratory symptoms. Ideally individuals would be >6 feet apart in waiting areas.

Plan to Take the Following Actions if COVID-19 is spreading in your community

1. Work with local and state public health organizations, healthcare coalitions, and other local partners to understand the impact and spread of the outbreak in your area.
2. Designate clinic staff who will be responsible for caring for suspected or known COVID-19 patients. Ensure they are trained on [the infection prevention and control recommendations](#) for COVID-19 and proper use of personal protective equipment.
3. Monitor healthcare workers and ensure maintenance of essential healthcare facility staff and operations:
 - Ensure staff are aware of sick leave policies and are encouraged to stay home if they are ill with respiratory symptoms.
 - Be aware of [recommended work restrictions and monitoring](#) based on staff exposure to COVID-19 patients.
 - Advise staff to check for any signs of illness before reporting to work each day and notify their supervisor if they become ill.

- Do not require a healthcare provider’s note for staff who are sick with respiratory symptoms before returning to work.
 - Make contingency plans for increased absenteeism caused by staff illness or illness of their family members that would require them to stay home. Planning for absenteeism could include extending hours, cross-training current employees, or hiring temporary staff.
4. When possible, manage mildly ill COVID-19 patients [at home](#).
- Assess the ability of the individual and/or their caregiver to engage in home monitoring, the ability for safe isolation at home, and the risk of transmission in the individual’s home environment.
 - Caregivers and sick individuals should have clear instructions regarding home care and when and how to access the healthcare system for face-to-face care or urgent/emergency conditions.
 - If applicable, identify staff who can monitor those individuals at home with daily “check-ins” using telephone calls, text, “patient portals” or other means.

Instructions for Individuals Scheduling Appointments

- When scheduling appointments for people to be seen at the Article 16 clinic, instruct individuals and persons who accompany them to call ahead to the clinic if they have symptoms of any respiratory infection (e.g., cough, runny nose, fever) and to take appropriate preventive actions (e.g., wear a facemask upon entry to contain cough, follow triage procedures).

Instructions for Individuals Upon Arrival and During the Clinic Visit

- Take steps to ensure all individuals with symptoms of suspected COVID-19 or other respiratory infection (e.g., fever, cough) adhere to respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette, hand hygiene, and triage procedures throughout the duration of the visit. Consider posting visual alerts (e.g., signs, posters) at the entrance and in strategic places (e.g., waiting areas, elevators, cafeterias).
- Ensure that individuals with symptoms of suspected COVID-19 or other respiratory infection (e.g., fever, cough) are not allowed to wait among other individuals seeking care. Identify a separate, well-ventilated space that allows waiting individuals to be separated by 6 or more feet, with easy access to respiratory hygiene supplies.
- Ensure rapid triage and isolation of individuals with symptoms of suspected COVID-19 or other respiratory infection (e.g., fever, cough):
- Identify individuals at risk for having COVID-19 infection before or immediately upon arrival to the healthcare facility.
- Implement triage procedures to detect [persons under investigation \(PUI\) for COVID-19](#) during or before triage or registration (e.g., at the time of check-in) and ensure that all individuals are asked about the presence of symptoms of a respiratory infection

and history of travel to areas experiencing transmission of COVID-19, or contact with others who have a suspected or confirmed diagnosis of COVID-19.

- Implement respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette (i.e., placing a surgical facemask over the individual's nose and mouth if that has not already been done and if this is not medically contraindicated) and isolate the individual. Additional guidance for evaluating individuals for COVID-19 infection can be found on the CDC [COVID-19 website](#).
- Follow reporting procedures which dictate the steps to take regarding a person under investigation for COVID-19.
- Provide supplies for respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette, including 60%-95% alcohol-based hand sanitizer, tissues, no touch receptacles for disposal, and surgical facemasks at healthcare facility entrances, waiting rooms, check-ins areas, etc.

RESOURCES

More information on the NYS Department of Health (DOH) and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Recommendations can be found at:

<https://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/coronavirus/>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/infection-control/control-recommendations.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fhcp%2Finfection-control.html#collapse_31135e5a9a0a20319

[NYS Department of Health – Local Department of Health Contact List](#)

For OPWDD Operated Article 16 Clinics: If you have any questions or concerns, or require assistance in implementing these management strategies, please feel free to contact the **Infection Control Officer** at the appropriate DDSOO.