Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) Preparedness for Frontline Staff

Montgomery County (MD) | Updated: March 19, 2020

In interfacing with the public, it is important to understand that over the coming weeks and months each of us is likely to encounter clients, coworkers or members of the public that are not feeling well. In those cases, it is important to understand that the symptoms of COVID-19 are similar to the common cold and the flu. Maintaining social distancing practices (greater than 6 feet apart), proper hand and cough hygiene is always important, no matter what type of respiratory illness is going around. For this reason, if the client encounter can occur over the phone or video chat, this is preferred. However, to be vigilant and provide our frontline staff with the necessary tools and information to safely and effectively perform their important work when clients come to the office, please find the below guidance in addressing the growing concern about COVID-19.

Assessment of Sick Individuals

If in any interaction you suspect that the person you are working with appears to be ill or reveals that they are not feeling well, please follow this simple process.

1. **Ask how the potentially ill person is feeling.** COVID-19 is characterized by symptoms including fever of greater than 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit (99.6 degrees Fahrenheit in individuals over the age of 60), coughing, shortness of breath or trouble breathing.
2. **If the individual confirms they have one or more of the above symptoms:**
   a. Non-Essential Service: If available, provide the individual with a surgical mask and ask them to reschedule the visit. Instruct the individual to return home (avoid public transportation) and begin self-isolation immediately. If they have any questions or concerns, instruct them to contact their healthcare provider by phone. If they do not have a healthcare provider, get their contact information and let them know someone will follow up by phone to assist them with this need.
   b. Essential Service: If you must meet with a sick individual, provide the individual with a mask, ask them to put it on and move to a place where you can maintain a distance of 6 feet. When closer proximity to the individual is required, ask the client to turn their head away from you and place a mask on yourself as well. All attempts must be made to not meet directly with sick individuals.

Cleaning, Hand Hygiene and Universal Precautions

The best way to prevent respiratory illnesses, including COVID-19, is to avoid being exposed to the virus. Below are steps to protect yourself.

1. Frequent handwashing using soap and water for a duration of 20 seconds or more is critical to maintaining personal health. Furthermore, avoiding frequent touching of your nose, eyes or mouth is effective in limiting the spread of illness.
2. Use paper towels or tissues to open doors, push buttons in the elevator, or to avoid directly touching surfaces touched by others.
3. Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue or use the inside of your elbow. Make sure to throw the used tissues in the trash and immediately wash your hands.
4. For clients with appointments, call them before the appointment to inquire about their health status and cancel or reschedule their appointment.
5. Whenever possible, conduct business by phone, email or other virtual means rather than meeting in person.
6. Getting the flu vaccine is an effective way of reducing the overall level of disease in the community. Not only is flu a potentially dangerous illness itself, its initial symptoms are generic and similar to those experienced by Coronavirus infection. Therefore, if we can reduce the number of flu cases through vaccination, we can reduce the number of misidentified suspect cases of COVID-19 and make it easier for our healthcare system to quickly identify any COVID-19 case that may arise in the future.
7. Clinical providers should continue to use personal protective equipment (PPE) in a manner consistent with clinical best practice and CDC guidance. Non-clinical staff should utilize social distancing[1] or available PPE[2] when engaging any person they believe to be sick.
8. Regularly clean high traffic areas, including waiting rooms, door handles, counter tops or other surfaces with an EPA-approved cleaner that can kill non-enveloped viruses (coronavirus, influenza, etc). This will often be readily identifiable on the label of the cleaner.
9. Post signs with instructions for staff, clients, and other members of the public to wash their hands and cover their cough.
10. Continue to monitor CDC guidance and the Montgomery County website for additional information on COVID-19 and other emerging infectious diseases.

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[1] A technique that limits the spread of infectious diseases by eliminating the direct contact (touching, sharing of implements) that one person has with another. It generally involves maintaining a separation of approximately 6 feet.

[2] The CDC does not recommend surgical masks for healthy individuals, instead indicating that the spread of respiratory germs is better prevented when the sick individual wears it as a barrier.

Resources

- **Centers for Disease Control (CDC)**
  http://www.cdc.gov/covid-19
- **Montgomery County COVID-19 Preparedness**
  http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/coronavirus