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To: Ohio EMS providers, EMS agencies, and EMS medical directors

From: Carol A. Cunningham, M.D., FAAEM, FAEMS
State Medical Director

Date: July 17, 2020

RE: Updated Critical COVID-19 Information

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued an updated interim guidance on July 15, 2020. This updated guidance includes new recommendations for EMS providers in addition to those stated in a previous guidance that were highlighted in my memo on March 10, 2020 (https://www.ems.ohio.gov/links/COVID-19/covid_memo.pdf). The two key updates are as follows:

1. In areas with moderate to substantial community transmission, there is a higher incidence of patients with asymptomatic or pre-symptomatic COVID-19 infection. If COVID-19 infection is not suspected based upon the patient's symptoms and exposure history, EMS providers should follow standard and transmission-based precautions and implement the following procedures:
 - Wear eye protection and a face mask to ensure protection of the eyes, nose, and mouth from all splashes and sprays of infectious materials.
 - Wear an N-95 or equivalent or higher-level respirator (instead of a face mask) when performing aerosol-generating procedures.
 - Respirators with exhalation valves for placement on the patients are not recommended for source control.
2. The COVID-19 virus has been added to the list of infectious diseases cited in the Ryan White HIV/AIDS Treatment Extension Act of 2009. As such, all medical facilities and public safety answering points (PSAPs) may notify emergency response employees that they are or may about to be exposed to a patient with a life-threatening infectious disease without violating the federal Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA).

While these are the new items in the CDC interim guidance, I highly recommend that you read the entire document and review the prior recommendations. The updated document can be accessed at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/guidance-for-ems.html>.

Mission Statement

"to save lives, reduce injuries and economic loss, to administer Ohio's motor vehicle laws and to preserve the safety and well being of all citizens with the most cost-effective and service-oriented methods available."

The COVID-19 pandemic response is inherently a dynamic process, and the scientific community continues to learn more about this life-threatening virus with each passing day. However, one thread remains true. The maintenance of the healthcare workforce is essential to patient care and survival. It is imperative that we take care of ourselves in order to have the sufficient ability and resources to care for others. Although it may sound like a broken record, personal protective equipment (PPE) is only effective if it is worn for each and every patient encounter. As cited in the CDC guidance, EMS providers should also wear face coverings, preferably a face mask, and practice social distancing and frequent hand washing during their entire shift on duty including the periods of time when not in service. These measures protect our colleagues as well as our treasured loved ones at home.

During these challenging times, I hope and pray that all of us and our families remain safe and healthy. Once again, I thank all of you for your dedicated service to Ohio EMS and to the residents and visitors of the State of Ohio.