



S A F E T Y S E R V I C E P R O T E C T I O N

OHIO EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES



Robert L. Wagoner, Executive
Director

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Ohio

**Department of
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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: November 10, 2020
RE: **The Surge in COVID-19 Cases**

The number of COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations, and deaths are rising nationwide, including within Ohio. Numerous factors are contributing to these statistics and, regardless of the specific etiologies, the demand for EMS response will inherently increase. As we navigate through this pandemic, it is imperative that we continue to provide compassionate patient care, exercise the recommended safety measures, and maximize the protection of our workforce.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued a guidance for first responders (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/guidance-for-ems.html>) on July 15, 2020. Although this guidance remains unchanged, I want to highlight a few

of their recommendations in light of the fact that there are numerous counties in Ohio experiencing a statistically significant increase in COVID-19 cases. Asymptomatic or pre-symptomatic persons who are infected with the COVID-19 virus are contagious and can spread the virus to others. Due to this fact, every person encountered by an EMS provider, whether it is a patient or a co-worker, should be considered potentially infectious. Face coverings for source control (preferably a face mask), social distancing, and frequent hand washing are critical measures that prevent transmission of this disease.

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 (e.g. gloves, gowns) 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.

Within the sector of healthcare workers, the majority of COVID-19 cases have not been linked to contact with an infected patient when the appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) is donned. Instead, they occurred from transmission via community spread, including within the workplace from fellow employees. During the entirety of the period of time while on duty, EMS providers should:

- Wear a facemask at all times while they are in service, including in breakrooms or other spaces where they might encounter co-workers.
- Emphasize the importance of source control and physical distancing when engaged in non-patient care activities. This includes designating areas for EMS personnel to take breaks, eat, and drink that allow them to remain at least 6 feet apart from each other, especially when they must be unmasked.
- Exercise frequent hand hygiene.

The most effective method of disease prevention continues to be immunization against a pathogen through vaccination. As the influenza season intersects with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the State Board of Emergency Medical, Fire, and Transportation Services approved the *Influenza Vaccinations by Ohio EMS Providers* training module

as an educational resource for Ohio's EMS providers and EMS medical directors. Although completion of this course is not mandatory, it is provided free of charge and is approved for Ohio EMS continuing education hours. The training module will soon be available via the Public Safety Training Campus.

Efforts are currently underway to develop a safe and effective COVID-19 vaccine. If and when it is approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the State Board of Emergency Medical, Fire, and Transportation Services and the Ohio Department of Public Safety, Division of EMS stand poised to provide a similar COVID-19 vaccine administration training module for Ohio EMS once the information regarding the dosing regimen, routes of administration, contraindications, and other parameters becomes available.

The COVID-19 pandemic has created unprecedented challenges to our healthcare systems and other facets of our society. Nevertheless, I am so proud of the dedicated service that all of you are unselfishly providing to your communities and to all of the residents and visitors of Ohio. While we care for others, we cannot neglect the need to care for and maintain ourselves, both physically and mentally. Don your PPE, wash your hands, get vaccinated, and take time to share a moment of laughter and tears with a good friend. EMS is a team sport, and we are all in this together!