

PRIORITY OBJECTIVES

Develop a campaign to communicate

- Hospitals are safe and stand ready to care for patients, for both urgent and non-urgent procedures, as well as emergency care. If they're experiencing an emergency, people must not avoid seeking the care they need, or delay care, in fear of safety or in fear of overburdening the system.
- Thank health care workers, first responders and the community for working together to flatten the curve and resume safe, responsible care.

This campaign will include a variety of communication tools and channels, such as web, digital and social media via NHHA and member hospitals.

| COMMUNICATION GOAL | COMMUNICATION TOOL | COMMUNICATION AUDIENCE |
|---|--|--|
| Hospitals Remain Safe & Ready – If You Need Medical Care, Seek Medical Care | NHHA Op-Ed PSA w/ Bureau of EMS Social Media Earned Media | General Public |
| Resuming Safe, Responsible Care | NHHA Op-Ed PSA w/ Bureau of EMS Social Media Earned Media | General Public |
| Thank You to Our Health Care Heroes | NHHA Op-Ed Video Social Media Earned Media | General Public Healthcare Workers First Responders |
| National Nurses Week / National Hospital Week | NHHA Op-Ed (2) Social Media | General Public Healthcare Workers First Responders |

RESUMING SAFE, RESPONSIBLE CARE

Talking Points, May 1, 2020

BACKGROUND

On March 16, the New Hampshire Hospital Association (NHHA) issued guidance to its members in response to calls from the US Surgeon General, the American College of Surgeons (ACS) and other state and national public health experts to consider cancellation of elective and non-urgent procedures for New Hampshire hospitals.

While many New Hampshire hospitals followed the March 16th NHHA guidance, some had already begun to suspend those services in advance of that guidance following the ACS recommendations released on March 13. As hospitals in the Granite State were preparing for an anticipated significant surge in COVID-19 cases, this was important advice for several reasons, including: 1) to preserve personal protective equipment (PPE); 2) to preserve inpatient hospital capacity; and 3) to promote social distancing in order to reduce the spread of the virus. Decisions to delay care were made carefully between clinicians and patients, but further delay for some could have serious implications for their health and outcomes.

Due to the significant steps the state has taken to ensure social distancing, including a number of Emergency Orders issued by Governor Sununu to encourage residents to stay at home whenever possible, close non-essential businesses, limiting the size of gatherings and many more, as well as citizens responsibly adhering to those directives, New Hampshire has to date far avoided a large surge that would stress and potentially overwhelm hospital capacity.

As we begin the process of responsibly resuming health care services in our hospitals and work our way back to a more normal health care environment, hospitals and their staff have been planning to make sure all patients coming back to receive the medical care they need will do so in a safe and secure environment. Every hospital will have procedures in place to ensure the segregation of COVID-19 and non-COVID-19 patients needing treatment.

The decisions regarding resuming responsible care must rely on the availability of adequate PPE to protect their staff and patients, as well as sufficient testing supplies and testing capacity for hospitals and health systems.

This phased approach is subject to the understanding of all affected healthcare facilities/entities that at any point if there is significant change in the number or trajectory of COVID-19 cases, the timeline may be altered, held or reversed to ensure adequate resources and capacity to care for those patients based on then current projections to ensure safe and adequate services to our surrounding communities and the state as a whole.

TALKING POINTS

It will be up to each individual hospital to decide when and how to phase-in time sensitive services and will rely on the decisions between health care providers and their patients on when the time is appropriate.

Patients can enter [HOSPITAL] knowing no one takes the delivery of health care more seriously than our doctors, nurses and staff who have courageously led our institution through this crisis.

Significant progress has been made in combatting the COVID-19 pandemic and treating those afflicted with the virus, and this has been a top priority for New Hampshire's hospitals. As this crisis has evolved, we have gained a better understanding of our capacity to meet the needs of COVID-19 patients.

As part of our mission to deliver safe quality care, [HOSPITAL] continues to engage in vigilant infection prevention measures to reduce the risk of any infection while implementing additional protocols in response to the pandemic.

Those prevention measures and protocols have included enhanced cleaning protocols, universal screening for risk factors and symptoms of COVID-19 or other infectious diseases, changing patient flow and waiting areas to accommodate social distancing, curbside and outdoor testing to better identify and isolate suspected COVID-19 patients, and universal masking for patients upon entry to our facility.

These measures will remain in place to reduce the risk of spreading any infectious disease, including COVID-19, and help to keep patients safe.

As [HOSPITAL] begins the process of responsibly resuming health care services and work our way back to a more normal health care environment, we have been vigilant in our planning to make sure that our patients coming back to receive the medical care they need will be doing so in a safe and secure environment.

Following the guidance released by the state on May 1st, [HOSPITAL] will phase-in procedures based on our assurance and ability to deliver safe and effective health care in accordance with:

- Clinical judgement in partnership with patients and families
- Established guidelines ensuring safe segregation and treatment of COVID-19 and non-COVID-19 patients
- Sufficient availability of personal protective equipment to ensure the safety of both patients and staff
- Adequate testing supplies and equipment
- Alignment with established guidelines developed by the Centers for Disease Control and other regulatory agencies
- Flexible policies permitting immediate response to any COVID-19 surge

[HOSPITAL] can provide its patients and community with the assurance that hospital personnel will have the personal protective equipment (PPE) necessary to ensure the health and safety of themselves and their patients.

In addition, [HOSPITAL] has implemented specific procedures to ensure the segregation of COVID-19 and non-COVID-19 patients needing treatment.

We have the capacity to treat these patients now and as the disease progresses, while at the same time safely providing care for New Hampshire residents in need of time sensitive, medically necessary care unrelated to COVID-19.

While the crisis is far from over, we know that COVID-19 will continue to be the primary focus of hospitals and health care providers for the foreseeable future, however we are mindful of the many New Hampshire residents who have deferred care for chronic conditions and other non-urgent medical needs.

[HOSPITAL] will continue to partner with public health and others to monitor the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic so that we can be prepared for periodic or unpredictable increases in the number of cases that may occur in our region and make the adjustments necessary to ensure the safety of our patients and healthcare workers.

Keeping patients safe through vigilant prevention measures to stop the spread of COVID-19 is a priority for [HOSPITAL], and we remain committed to protecting both patients and health care workers as we move into this new phase of health care delivery.

RESUMING RESPONSIBLE CARE

Welcome Back PSA

The content below can be used for a PSA as a welcome back announcement to your patients – change the content as suits your individual hospital and use on social media, your website or in a video with clinical leadership expressing the sentiments below. If you create a specific page dedicated to reopening your hospital to elective and non-urgent procedures, or to communicate the importance of not delaying necessary medical care any longer, it could welcome patients back and communicate the measures your hospitals are taking to ensure the safest care for both patient and provider.

Sample PSA Content:

At [HOSPITAL NAME], we are ready to care for you – **safely**. Safely performing elective surgery and same-day procedures. Safely seeing patients across our service lines, including the emergency department, radiology, obstetrics, therapy and lab.

We know you may have recently delayed care. We urge you not to delay the medical care you need any longer.

While our services may look different, our commitment to high-quality, compassionate, personalized health care remains the same.

We welcome you back to [HOSPITAL NAME].

Learn more at [HOSPITAL WEBSITE]/welcomeback.

[HOSPITAL NAME, TAGLINE].

RESUMING SAFE, RESPONSIBLE CARE

Press Release Template

The sample press release template can be modified for any hospital use to include specific leadership quotes, infection prevention measures, continued safety precautions and individual approaches to phasing back into operations suspended procedures.

[HOSPITAL / HEALTH SYSTEM] Resumes Elective and Outpatient Procedures
[HOSPITAL] Remains Ready for Potential Medical Surge

[LOCATION, DATE] – [HOSPITAL] announced today it will begin to resume elective surgery and outpatient procedures previously suspended due to preparing its facility for COVID-19 patients. The decision follows the release of Governor Sununu’s announcement Friday, May 1 to safely begin resuming some business activities, with [HOSPITAL] scheduling [LOW-RISK / URGENT] patients for procedures starting [DATE].

“This is great news for patients who have placed their care plans on hold due to COVID-19,” said [CEO OF HOSPITAL]. “Our team is ready to deliver safe care to all patients. We continue to follow all Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and New Hampshire Department of Health & Human Services safety guidelines.”

Safety protocols put in place regarding care include, but are not limited to [LIST AS APPROPRIATE]:

- All individuals entering [HOSPITAL] facilities, including team members, will continue to be screened for COVID-19 symptoms.
- All individuals entering [HOSPITAL] facilities will be asked to don a cloth mask. Patients may bring their own mask or may opt to wear one supplied by [HOSPITAL].
- All care team members will wear surgical masks and protective eye wear, as well as other necessary personal protective equipment (PPE), at all times when caring for patients.
- Visitors will still be prohibited. A support person will be allowed for surgical patients, delivering OB mothers; children under the age of 18; patients with confusion, altered mental status or developmental delays; and end-of-life patients.
- Six-foot social distances will be established in public areas such as waiting rooms.
- Enhanced cleaning and disinfection of high-touch, public surface areas will continue.
- Infectious patients will continue to be cared for in isolation, away from non-infectious patients.

In addition to the safety protocols, [HOSPITAL] remains prepared to cease non-essential procedures in the event a surge or peak of COVID-19 develops in the area.

“We’re able to lift restrictions due to the low COVID-19 transmission rate within our community and across the state,” said [CEO / CLINICAL LEADERSHIP]. “However, our new normal is living with the COVID-19 virus and changing the way we deliver care to our patients. As people resume activities, we may see a spike in the virus

and we will always side on protecting our patients, healthcare workers and community by returning to more restrictive policies and protocols. Until a vaccine or cure is found, [HOSPITAL] will remain prepared at all times to handle a surge and care for our community and surrounding area.”

To remain prepared, [HOSPITAL] will maintain a sufficient supply of PPE as well as other resources necessary to care for COVID-19 patients. In addition, [HOSPITAL] will collaborate with local clinics and the Department of Health & Human Services, the Division of Public Health Services and other partners to continually evaluate incidences and trends of COVID-19 cases within the immediate and the surrounding area.

“Safety is our top priority,” said [CEO / CLINICAL LEADERSHIP]. “Our services may look a little different in the new normal, but our commitment to our mission, to deliver high-quality, compassionate, personalized health care, remains the same.”

Patients who wish to schedule their elective surgery or outpatient procedure should first visit with their appropriate ordering provider. [ADJUST AS APPROPRIATE FOR YOUR HOSPITAL / AFFILIATED PHYSICIAN PRACTICES].

RESUMING SAFE, RESPONSIBLE CARE

Patient Checklist

Preparing for My Appointment

Things I want to know before going to the hospital or primary care office.

Going to get treatment may bring up a lot of questions for you, especially around your safety. Use this checklist to keep track important information and as a guide to make sure that you can check everything off before going for your appointment.

- ☐ They have told me, and I feel comfortable about how they are cleaning things especially between patients. There will be signs explaining this when I arrive.
- ☐ I have been provided with a resource to find out more about their cleaning practices.
- ☐ They explained how they will keep me safe from patients who have or might have COVID-19
- ☐ It has been explained what kind of Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) (gloves, masks and gowns) each person will to be wearing to keep them and me safe.
- ☐ I understand how they will be using testing for COVID-19 and how that keeps me and the staff safe.
- ☐ They have sent me the paperwork ahead of time so that I can do it at home and discuss it with my family.
- ☐ They have provided me with directions of where to go for the appointment.
- ☐ They have provided me with a list of what to bring with me.
- ☐ They explained what kind of mask to wear and what to do if I don't have one.
- ☐ They have explained who can come with me and where they can go when we arrive.
- ☐ How to use parking and valet services safely has been explained to me.
- ☐ If I am being dropped off, I have been told what to do and where to get picked up.
- ☐ They have provided me with directions as to what door to use as it might be different than before.
- ☐ They told me that there will be someone to guide me when I arrive so so I don't wind up in the wrong area.

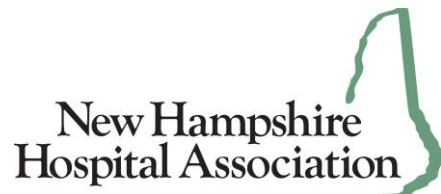
- ☐ They explained how to social distance when I arrive, in the parking lot and in the building.
- ☐ They explained the screening they are doing for COVID-19 and what that means for me.
- ☐ They explained how the check in process and waiting room has changed and what I need to do.
- ☐ They provided guidance as to how to safely use public areas such as the restroom or cafeteria.
- ☐ They provided with a website or phone number to get all this information so I can share it with family and friends who might want to know it also.
- ☐ I have asked all my questions and feel safe and comfortable about coming to my appointment.

Providing Patient Education for the New Normal

Today's health care environment will require different ways of doing things as patients come back into your facilities. This is a very confusing and scary time for patients, as they are getting messages from many media sources which often contradict each other. Patients and families will need clear and supportive messaging that embraces them as partners and increases their knowledge of how to be safe. Do not be afraid to message "too much" – more communication is better than doing too little. To assure safe care, all health care providers will need to develop and provide specific instructions to patients regarding requirements directed by the Governor and their organizations. NHHA recommends clear instructions with supporting information be provided to patients to achieve a high level of partnership and cooperation. For each topic below consider how to use print and electronic visuals on websites, social media, and inside the buildings (tv screens) that explain all the differences, precautions and what to expect. Consider providing scripts to staff to ensure messaging is consistent, especially for topics that may be more complex, such as testing.

- **The ways COVID-19 is spread:** Have simple explanation of how COVID-19 is spread and the importance of following recommended guidelines to keep everyone safe.
- **Entering the Facility:** Clearly communicate any instructions about parking, valet service, escorts and entrances that should be used. Explain cleaning procedures of these areas as needed.
- **Physical "Social" distancing:** Explain what physical distancing will look like to patients and how will they know where to safely be? What are the new procedures? When 6 feet is not possible how will patients, staff and clinicians be safe? What is the new "waiting room" going to look like? When should they arrive?
- **Visitors:** Explain the visitor policy including if they are bringing a child or someone who needs help in other ways. If someone has driven them to the appointment where should they wait?
- **COVID-19 Screening:** Describe, in detail, the screening that will be done before and during the visit for all patients and visitors. As needed, reassure them by explaining the procedure for screening staff and clinicians so there is an understanding of what is being done to keep everyone safe.
- **COVID-19 Testing:** Explain the testing requirements for surgeries and procedures as well as precautions they should follow to reduce risk of exposure to COVID-19. Include specific information about the approach to negative and positive test results.
- **Masks and other PPE:** Explain the mask policy and what type of masks are needed and whether the patient should bring their own or will be provided one. Use posters or other media to demonstrate what they can expect providers and staff to be wearing.
- **Environmental Cleaning:** Explain how the environment is being cleaned with attention to enhanced procedures for cleaning high touch surfaces, common areas and shared equipment.
- **Hand Hygiene:** Explain requirements for patients while at the facility, and availability of hand sanitizing products when hand washing not readily available.
- **Seek Patient Feedback:** Consider ways to obtain real-time feedback from patients and families so that there can be collaborative, continuous learning during this "new normal".

Delaying Care during COVID-19: Seek Care When You Need Care



Sample posts:

Patients should not avoid emergency care because of COVID-19 – you should seek the critical care you need during this time. We are safe, and we are here for you.

Hospitals throughout NH continue to treat all patients with medical emergencies – don't avoid seeking the care you need for fear of COVID-19. We are here for you.

Social distancing doesn't mean delaying the medical care you need – no one should let COVID-19 get in the way of their health. We are safe, and we here for you.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, heart attacks, strokes, and other medical emergencies still happen. Our hospitals remain safe places for emergency care – don't delay in getting the care you need. We are here for you.

Patient safety is every hospital's priority. Don't ignore the signs of a medical emergency – if you need medical care now, seek care now to avoid more serious repercussions to your long-term health. We are safe, and we are here for you.

New Hampshire hospitals have been national leaders when it comes to excellence in patient safety, and they have continued their vigilance and commitment to providing safe care for every patient. If you have a non-COVID medical emergency, don't delay in getting the care you need. We are safe, and we are here for you.

Chronic health conditions don't follow social distancing guidance! Your medical care and maintaining your chronic illness are critical during this pandemic. Your health matters.

Even during a pandemic, your local emergency room is safe and prepared. If you're experiencing a health emergency, don't wait to get help. We are here for you.

Keeping patients safe is our first priority, and we are taking every precaution to reduce the risk of exposure to COVID-19. Please don't wait to get the care you need now – if you are experiencing a medical emergency, we are here for you. Your health matters.

Hashtags:

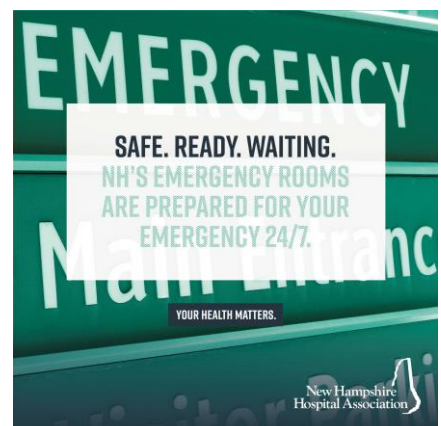
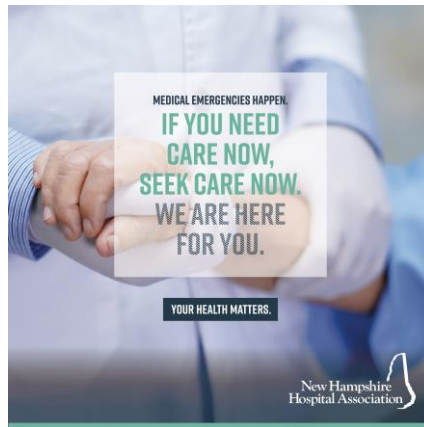
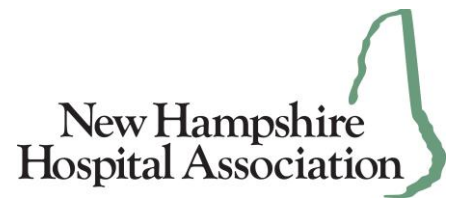
Below are the registered hashtags that we and others have been using related to safe care if helpful:

#HereForYou
#SafetyFirst

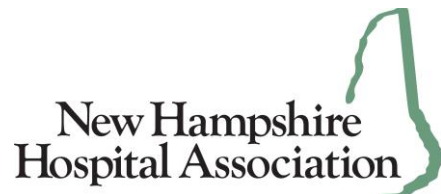
#BeatCOVID19
#PatientsFirst

#HealthyTogether
#YourHealthMatters

Delaying Care during COVID-19: Seek Care When You Need Care



Keeping New Hampshire Safe & Healthy during COVID-19



Sample posts:

According to the CDC, 35% of people with COVID-19 have NO symptoms. You could spread the virus to others without even knowing you have it! Even if you're healthy, please protect others by wearing a mask and staying 6 ft apart. We're all in this together – let's keep each other healthy.

It's easy to forget the response to COVID isn't "just" masks. There is a lot we can be doing to help keep each other healthy and protect those who are more vulnerable and made more vulnerable through their work. Wearing a mask keeps New Hampshire open.

Together for a #HealthyNewHampshire: *(can use with icons)*

| | |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Stay home when possible | Wear a face covering in public |
| Stay 6 feet apart from others | Wash your hands often |
| If sick, get tested then stay home | Clean your surroundings |
| Cover coughs and sneezes | Don't touch your face |

If you're enjoying the great outdoors, be sure to keep a 6-foot distance from others who are not in your immediate household – everyone needs to do their part to keep #NH healthy.

New Hampshire hospitals are on the front lines of [#COVID19](#) - providing safe and effective health care for our communities. Help us keep #NH safe by practicing social distancing and wearing a mask when out in public.

Our hospital is committed to ensuring the health and safety of every patient and every employee, which is why we need your help in keeping yourself and your family safe and healthy by wearing a mask and remembering to stay 6 ft apart when in public.

Hospitals are doing their part, and we need people to do theirs. Wearing a mask in public is still recommended and everyone should practice social distancing. The precautions are an act of kindness to yourself and others and critical to New Hampshire's health. We are all in this together.

Social distancing & wearing face masks in public can have a big impact in lowering the spread of #COVID19. It's up to each one of us to follow those simple rules. If we do, we can make a difference and reduce the devastating impact of COVID-19. Please, do your part!

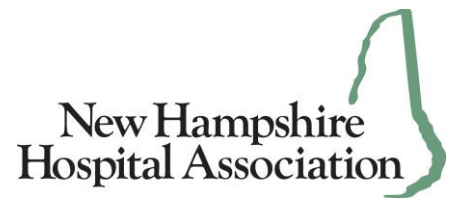
NH DHHS / CDC still recommends all Granite Staters / everyone wear masks or face coverings when in public to help slow the spread of #COVID19 - one more precaution can help keep everyone safe. Learn how at <http://NH.gov/covid19>

Hashtags:

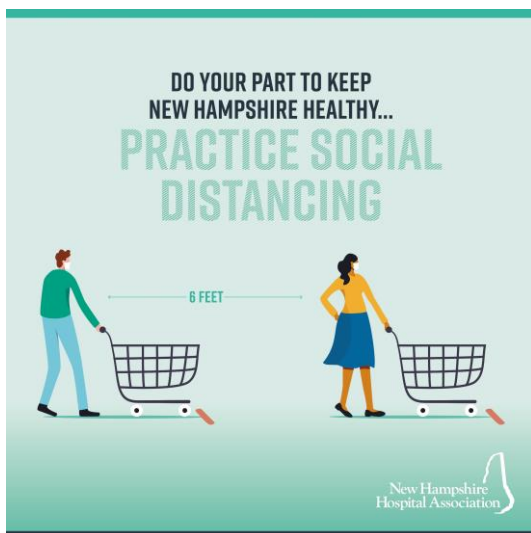
Below are the registered hashtags that we and others have been using if helpful:

| | | |
|-----------------|----------------|---------------------|
| #SafetyFirst | #BeatCOVID19 | #HealthyTogether |
| #MaskUp | #MaskUpNH | #MaskUpNewHampshire |
| #InThisTogether | #GraniteStrong | #WearingIsCaring |

Keeping New Hampshire Safe & Healthy during COVID-19



For those who haven't developed graphics yet for this type of messaging, feel free to use these with your own logo.



COMMUNICATIONS: INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL

As health care workers continue to fight the COVID-19 outbreak, it remains unclear how long the practice of social distancing and isolation will continue. As time moves on, the need for safe medical care not related to COVID-19 becomes more important than ever for the communities that hospitals and health systems serve. Emergency, non-emergent and preventive care is still available and safe to access.

Hospitals and health systems will need to communicate to their internal and external stakeholders how their plans and procedures have changed. Communications professionals will need to create post-COVID-19 strategies to inform the community about expanded or reopened services, continued protective measures and strongly encourage anyone in need of emergency care to go to the hospital.

Hospitals and health systems will need to be attuned to the overall mood of the community and shape the tenor of their communications appropriately, sharing accurate health information and helping the public overcome apprehension of seeking care.

Recognizing that recovery of the health care delivery infrastructure will happen on different timetables in different parts of the country, AHA provides a general messaging framework and communications toolkit that will include resources for hospitals to tailor and adapt for their staff and communities.

Hospitals and health systems need to communicate with many different audiences. But all communication outreach should meet certain core objectives that reinforce hospitals are open and care should not be delayed, hospitals and health systems are safe, and the well-being of caregivers and patients is a key priority. The messages below can be customized for different audiences — for example, internal or external, clinicians or patients — but they should reinforce the same objectives.

OVERARCHING COMMUNICATIONS RESOURCES/TALKING POINTS

Hospitals, health systems and clinics are a safe place to seek care, no matter what your health need. Since well before the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic, the safety of our patients is and always has been our first priority. Our hospitals safely manage infectious diseases every day. We will continue to provide safe, effective, patient-centered care in our facilities.

First and foremost, we are following the guidance and direction of our public health experts, closely monitoring and adopting new findings and following clinical protocols developed by expert scientists and clinicians in every discipline of care.

OVERARCHING MESSAGES ON COVID-19 AND MOVING TO RECOVERY

We are ready, safe and open for you. In coordination with area health care providers, local and state government leaders are returning to pre-COVID-19 operations by DATE. ***IF RELEVANT** This includes immediately resuming procedures such as heart valve replacement, tumor removals and other so-called elective procedures.* As we reinstitute operations, we will follow guidance in the National Coronavirus Response to ensure patient safety and prevent the spread of COVID-19 or a resurgence of the virus throughout the state.

Emergencies don't stop, and neither do we. Do not delay care for heart attacks, strokes, falls and other urgent needs. We will continue fighting COVID-19. We will provide our physicians, nurses, other team members and

patients everything they need to stay safe. And we'll continue caring for you and your family. Thank you for doing your part. We are here to do ours.

We're here to keep you healthy and safe. We have taken extra precautions to ensure our employees and patients are safe. First and foremost, we are following the guidance and direction of our public health experts and closely monitoring key issues and following clinical protocols. *[Be specific about what measures you are taking to keep patients safe.]*

Thanks to our health care heroes. The doctors, nurses, respiratory therapists and entire health care workforce – cafeteria workers, environmental services, and other support staff – who are in this fight on the front lines are facing pressure unlike ever before. They are heroes, and no amount of thanks is enough.

The health and safety of our community – including our workforce – remain the top priority. COVID-19 has enhanced our already intensive patient safety efforts and ensured we are doing everything possible to keep staff safe as well. You will see additional precautions, including intensive cleaning processes, in all areas of the hospital, particularly the emergency department and intensive care units, as well as:

- Increased COVID-19 testing opportunities, including curbside testing
- Social distancing in waiting rooms and mask use in common areas
- Restrictions on visitors
- Limited entry and exit points
- Asking patients to stay in their cars after arrival until called into the office
- Using virtual care when it is available and appropriate

COVID-19 COMMUNICATIONS TOOLS AND RESOURCES

- [COVID-19 Communications Resources](#)
- [COVID-19 Communications Checklist](#)

FRAMEWORK THROUGH WHICH ALL MESSAGING AROUND “REOPENING” SHOULD BE CONSIDERED

As a guiding principle, ALL decisions will be grounded in science and data and will be made in the interest of delivering safe, needed care.

- Prevention and treatment of COVID-19 will continue – prioritizing the safety and well-being of patients, the health care workforce and the community.
- Communicate openly and often during this time of crisis – sharing concrete examples of safety measures, protocols and national guidelines being followed to keep patients safe.
- Ensure that all community members know that their local hospital is open, safe and ready to provide emergency care whenever needed. Care should not be delayed.
- Consider coordination and collaboration with partners for effective and consistent communications – including providers along the continuum of care, as well as other community stakeholders.

INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS PLAN AND CHECKLIST

As the cornerstone of the health care community, hospitals and health systems play a crucial role in providing science-backed information and helpful resources to keep the public safe and informed. Communicating early and often with staff will be crucial in efforts to instill confidence in the ability and safety of our organizations. The women and men bravely fighting this virus must feel safe and be supportive of recovery efforts. As many hospitals and health systems have been doing over the past two months, open and transparent communication with staff must be in place before any large public communications effort occurs. It is critical that staff and internal partners, such as trustees, are updated and consulted frequently. Staff play a critical role in creating confidence in the safety and quality of care provided. Providing them with the information necessary to act as ambassadors for this messaging is a high priority. Consider conducting a brief internal communications survey to gauge the effectiveness of internal communications.

EMPLOYEE BACKGROUNDER

Provide employees a concise reference document or location (intranet) with links to relevant clinical guidelines, resources and documents. As the pandemic continues and our recovery efforts evolve, new information will become available, and it will be helpful to provide staff a single source for updated content and guidance. This single source should be designed with the input of various disciplines throughout the hospital, including but not limited to human resources, risk management, clinical specialties, such as infectious disease and employee health and wellness. This information could include:

- [National guidance on non-emergent procedures](#)
- Internal policy on resuming non-emergent procedures
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention infection control recommendations
- Safely Caring for COVID-19 Patients: Tools for Your Workforce
- Isolation protocols
- Training needs and offerings
- Testing procedures
- PPE supply status
- Staffing plans
- Wellness services
- Employee assistance programs
- Work from home assistance when appropriate

INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

During times of crisis and uncertainty, it is more important than ever that hospital and health system leaders provide clear and frequent updates to ALL staff members (clinical and otherwise). Communications should be designed to offer timely day-to-day messages, in addition to information on future planning and what staff can expect to see. Members have reported that a daily huddle for leaders to share updates, to hear a common message

regarding status, and to problem-solve is a powerful way to keep the organization aligned with priorities and next steps. Consider recording these messages and making them available for staff who might not be able to be present. Through coordination of talking points, communication dissonance can be avoided or at least minimized.

Proactive communication with staff is critical; share information about steps being taken to ensure the safety and well-being of staff and patients, outline guidance and protocols for staff, and offer recognition and appreciation. Hospital employees serve as influential messengers with patients and within the community.

Below is a general framework for consideration as part of any internal communications plan. Please tailor this framework to meet the needs of your own organization and community and to align with your internal communication strategy during the COVID-19 crisis and progress toward recovery.

| WHO TO COMMUNICATE WITH | |
|---|--|
| AUDIENCE | EXAMPLES |
| Clinical staff (communications should go to leaders as well as front-line workers.) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Doctors, nurses, techs and all other front-line caregivers |
| All hospital staff (all departments) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All staff including environmental services, engineers, food services, pharmacy, etc. |
| Other clinical partners | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community physicians Providers along the continuum of care Key vendor partners |
| Human resources | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> HR must have up-to-date information, particularly as it relates to any staffing changes |
| Trustees | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many boards do not meet frequently; consider more frequent communications throughout the COVID-19 crisis |
| Auxiliaries | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Volunteers must be aware of all new COVID-19-related protocols |
| Key community partners | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider keeping community organizations, medical or otherwise, affiliated with the hospital/health system abreast of current practices, including local business leaders (for academic health systems, this will include faculty and staff, residents, fellows, students, etc.) |
| HOW OFTEN TO COMMUNICATE | |
| ***This may depend on where states/communities are in the pandemic. | |
| FREQUENCY | EXAMPLES |
| Daily: Overcommunication is key during times of uncertainty. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff emails Text messages |
| Weekly: Highlight key dates so staff feel informed and engaged in any new processes. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intranet postings Staff meetings Leadership messages |

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| Monthly (or bi-monthly): Share data, accomplishments. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership video messages • Success stories, vignettes |
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HOW TO REACH INTERNAL AUDIENCES

| COMMUNICATION VEHICLES | EXAMPLES |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Traditional staff email | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate often, share relevant information and solicit feedback |
| Newsletters/Weekly overview | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compile key information/ reminders of key information |
| Intranet | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Since the situation may change rapidly, provide staff a single source for updated resources |
| Text messages | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer relevant and timely updates |
| Video messages | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leaders can share message of inspiration, pride and thanks |
| Interactive video meetings | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interactive meeting platforms offer a good opportunity for Q&A with staff |
| Signage | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reinforce key messages, checklists and protocols on visible signage |
| Staff meetings | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share information during department meetings |
| Website updates | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spotlight staff, highlight successes and reinforce key messages; consider including a way for the community to express gratitude and support |
| Social media posts | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spotlight staff, highlight successes and reinforce key messages, including appreciation |
| Outdoor signage | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look for opportunities to spotlight your health care heroes – could include banners, outdoor signage, elevator wraps, etc. |

WHAT TO COMMUNICATE ABOUT

| TOPICS | EXAMPLES |
|--|---|
| Status of PPE supply | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share information about availability of PPE; if relevant, share efforts underway to secure additional PPE • Offer instructions on PPE usage |
| Availability of tests | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share information about testing capability/options • Criteria for testing |
| Plans to reopen/resume services | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer clear guidance on the plans to resume non-emergent surgeries • Guidelines for determining readiness to reopen • Process under which surgeries will be scheduled |
| Infection control processes/guidelines | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review infection control checklists, highlight any new practices |
| Clinical processes/protocols | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share guidelines for resuming non-emergent surgeries; highlight any new practices, workflow patterns, etc. |

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|--------------------------------------|---|
| Safety steps/checklists | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Highlight measures being taken to ensure both staff and patient safety during the continued COVID-19 crisis |
| Workforce/staffing considerations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proactively share information about staffing changes, furloughs and reductions in pay |
| Solicit feedback | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage employees to share their feelings, what they need or are concerned about |
| Recognition, wellness and resiliency | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is important to show signs of thanks, from leaders and also patients and community members Recognize the dedication of staff members Provide resiliency and well-being resources for team members Routinely spotlight wellness resources, mental health hotlines, etc. at the bottom of internal messages |
| Share success stories | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keep morale up by sharing success stories, examples of things going well, progress being made Engage staff to help identify success stories/moments of pride |

WHAT TOOLS ARE AVAILABLE FOR EMPLOYEES

| RESOURCES | EXAMPLES |
|---|---|
| Online forum | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider an online community or forum with a Q&A function for staff to ask questions, get advice from leaders and also peers |
| Resource center | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a place to house all relevant documents, tools and resources related to COVID-19 |
| Talking points/Messages for patients | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consistency of message is important; share topline messages and guidance to patients so clinicians are able to share information about the hospital/health system practices |
| Printable signage for clinician offices | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide collateral materials with consistent messaging to be shared with patients and used in clinician offices |
| Discounts/Specials | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share information about current discounts and specials available for health care workers |

COMMUNICATIONS ASSESSMENT FOR LEADERS

As key members of the health care community, hospitals and health systems play a crucial role in providing accurate information based in science that will keep the public safe and informed. Caregivers, staff members and internal partners will be turned to as credible sources of information. It is essential that they have the information needed to do their jobs well, keeping patients and themselves safe and healthy.

This self-assessment is designed to help hospital and health system leaders evaluate how they are communicating internally, what mechanisms are in place and working well, along with potential opportunities to enhance communication efforts.

PROTECTING YOUR HEALTH CARE WORKERS

- Communicate often; frequency should increase during a crisis.
- Be transparent with staff as it relates to what measures are being taken to ensure their safety and well-being.
- Share updates on any new guidance or clinical protocols that should be followed.
- Outline and remind staff what ongoing processes are in place to keep them safe.
- Share patient- and public-facing communications internally to ensure staff are aware and can be consistent in their own responses to patient questions.

HOSPITALS ARE OPEN AND SAFE, AND NEEDED CARE SHOULD NOT BE DELAYED

- Clinicians and hospital employees are valued sources of information within a community; make sure they know current operational status and are able to share key messages.
- Provide employees with easy-to-relay messages about what safety precautions are in place and status of full operations.

NON-EMERGENCY PROCEDURES ARE RESUMING

- Share guidelines for how the restart of non-emergent procedures will be determined, following state guidelines as well as internal hospital policies.
- Share guidelines on types of surgeries considered non-emergent procedures.
- Provide employees with easy-to-relay messages about what measures have been taken and what they can expect when they come to the hospital.

ESTABLISH TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION WITH HEALTH CARE WORKERS

- Create mechanisms to solicit feedback from employees; understand how they are feeling during these uncertain times.
- Establish a clear path for employees to share concerns and for organizational follow-up to those individuals.
- Ensure you communicate timely and proactively about any new changes or policies so staff are able to ask questions and raise concerns.
- Consider hosting in-person or virtual staff meetings that allow questions from staff.

PROVIDE COMMUNICATIONS RESOURCES FOR STAFF

- Develop and share basic messages, tips and to-dos that health care workers can easily relay to patients and to community members.
- Ensure that staff know how and where they can access all relevant materials, from clinical guidelines and safety protocols to talking points and posters.

RECOGNIZE AND ACKNOWLEDGE STAFF

- In addition to sharing information, people need encouragement and inspiration.
- Don't hesitate to send thank-you messages to your team.
- Acknowledge the battle health care workers are fighting and the toll on them and their families, and let them know they are appreciated.
- Be certain to compile and share messages of gratitude and pride sent by others, in addition to resiliency and well-being resources and support services.

ENGAGE A FULL SPECTRUM OF CONSTITUENTS

- Providing high-quality care takes a full team; when appropriate, consider tailoring communications resources for the variety of work units within the hospital.
- Provide communications resources to employed and independent clinicians so patients receive consistent messages.
- Share communication resources and updates with your governing board and other important stakeholders within your community.

CONSIDER NEW MECHANISMS TO COMMUNICATE WITH STAFF

- This is a stressful time. Consider new mechanisms to conveniently communicate with staff and then do it again. It is worth sending a message more than once or in different ways.
- Explore different platforms to communicate with staff, including digital platforms, webinars and virtual town halls, among others.
- Embrace video as an engaging way to deliver messages from leaders, staff, patients and the community.

CELEBRATE THE POSITIVE

- We have a long road ahead of us; share the success stories and positive outcomes.
- Consider engaging staff to share messages of hope, lessons learned and if appropriate patient vignettes.

EXTERNAL MESSAGING

Communication efforts should first demonstrate how hospitals and health systems are continuing to fight the COVID-19 pandemic while stressing that taking measured steps enables the field to move safely toward providing care to those with health care needs beyond COVID-19. This is an opportune time for hospitals and health systems to emphasize their roles as the trusted resource for their community, to seize the conversation and control the narrative. Consider naming a small number of spokespersons to assure consistent messaging, regardless of the communication channel. Through coordination of talking points, a consistent message can be sent.

The field is able to protect the healthy and at the same time care for the sick and injured. While we know that has always been the case, both the public narrative and the public health precautions we have been taking may result in public anxiety about returning to hospitals for needed medical care. With enhanced safety protocols in place and appropriate supply of PPE and by following national and local guidelines, hospitals and health systems can ensure that it is appropriate and safe to resume all levels of care.

There is a need and an opportunity to show strength as a field, uniting with consistent themes of safety and readiness, grounding all action in science and guidance by public health and clinical experts, and demonstrating the clear and concrete examples of what hospitals do (always and specific to this pandemic) to keep patients safe.

Recovery is going to happen on different timetables across the country, but the general messaging framework and elements of communications should be consistent.

CONSISTENT TOP-LEVEL MESSAGES

- Hospitals and health systems are able to protect the healthy, while at the same time care for the sick and injured.
- Hospitals are open to ALL patients, and delaying diagnosis and treatment can put patients at great risk. If you are experiencing a medical emergency, do not be afraid to come to the hospital for immediate care.
- Long before this current health crisis, hospitals and health systems have had both workflow and infection control processes in place to ensure the safety of patients and health care workers. Facing challenges is not new for health care workers; in many ways, it is what they train for.
- In response to this specific health crisis, safety protocols have been enhanced and adapted to best meet the needs of the staff and patients. [Be specific about what measures you are taking to keep patients safe.]
- Your community hospital is carefully following national, state and local guidelines, and taking measured steps to ensure it is appropriate and safe to resume non-emergent elective procedures.

SUGGESTIONS FOR MASS COMMUNICATIONS

While we know the COVID-19 pandemic is far from over, hospitals and communities will begin to move through different phases of “recovery,” and it will be crucial that you maintain frequent communications with your community. A sample of ad content, social messaging, print media approaches, press releases and public service announcements is included in the Appendix. Consider the following as tactics to update the community with reliable health information.

- Video messages from hospital leaders and physicians
- Virtual town hall meetings
- Radio interviews/PSAs
- Open letter in newspaper
- Media briefings with different experts

COMMUNICATIONS ASSESSMENT FOR LEADERS

As a key member of the health care community, hospitals and health systems play a crucial role in providing accurate information based in science that keeps the public safe and informed. Hospital leaders, health care workers and community partners will be turned to as credible sources of information. Be sure your team has the information needed to assure patients and communities about the preparedness of hospitals to provide needed care – whether that be emergency care, COVID-19 care or diagnostic and preventive care.

This self-assessment is designed to offer a basic framework that hospital and health system leaders can use to evaluate how they are communicating with the public, what mechanisms are in place and working well, and where there are potential opportunities to enhance communication efforts.

ALL DECISIONS ARE BASED ON SCIENCE AND GUIDED BY PUBLIC HEALTH

- Provide frequent reminders that the hospital field follows federal and state guidance to effectively prepare and respond to anticipated COVID-19 challenges.
- Be transparent in sharing the guidance you are currently following.
- Share updates on any new guidance being followed or practices being put in place.

A DELIBERATE AND TIERED APPROACH IS BEING TAKEN TO RESUME NON-EMERGENT PROCEDURES

- Be transparent in sharing the framework for when and how your hospital will shift to “recovery.”
- Share guidelines for how the restart of non-emergent procedures will be determined.
- Outline the steps, milestones and timeframe that will dictate these changes.
- Share guidelines on what type of surgeries are considered non-emergent.

HOSPITALS ARE OPEN AND SAFE, AND NEEDED CARE SHOULD NOT BE DELAYED

- Communicate clearly that hospitals are prepared for COVID-19-related needs, while also ready to care for other health care needs.
- Emergency care should NOT be delayed.
- Provide employees with easy-to-relay messages about the importance of not delaying emergency care and the protocols in place at the emergency department to ensure patient and visitor safety.
- Continue to share stories that demonstrate patients are getting safe, needed care.

HOSPITALS HAVE TAKEN STEPS TO MITIGATE RISK AND MAKE CARE SAFER

- Hospital and health systems have long been ready to care for illness and prevent the spread of infection. Remind patients of existing safety practices.
- Clearly communicate what additional steps hospitals have taken to make care safer and what patients can expect to see:
 - Limited points of entry
 - Screening for all patients before entering the facility
 - Restrictions on visitors
 - Separate triage and treatment for COVID-19 patients
- Telehealth visits may still be appropriate and preferred for some patients.

PROTECTING HEALTH CARE WORKERS

- Be transparent about what measures are being taken to ensure the safety and well-being of caregivers.
- Share updates on any new guidance or clinical protocols that should be followed.
- Emphasize hand hygiene, new guidelines for PPE and other infection prevention protocols.

MANY NEW SERVICES ARE NOW AVAILABLE

- Remind patients about new screening tools or hotlines for questions related to COVID-19.
- Remind patients that telehealth options remain for those who feel more comfortable with it or find it is more convenient.
- Remind the community about any new hotlines that have been created – mental health and others.

HOSPITALS HAVE MANY POSSIBLE MESSENGERS, IN STAFF AND OTHER COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS

- Clinicians and hospital employees are valued sources of information within a community. Make sure they are able to share key messages.
- Coordinate or consider aligning communications related to “reopening” with state or local health departments.
- Consider partnering with other community providers (even other hospitals) to offer consistent messaging about safety and the importance of not delaying emergency care.
- Share key messages and tools with local clinicians to be used in offices and with patients.
- Share key messages with trustees.
- Consider partnering with other community organizations or specialty groups, as there may be alignment in messaging, specifically as it relates to not delaying certain medical needs (heart attack, stroke, maternity care, immunization, etc.).
- Share communication updates with key vendors and other partners.

STRENGTH IN CONSISTENCY OF MESSAGE AND COORDINATION WITHIN THE FIELD

- Consider working collaboratively with other providers to share messages of safety and encouraging patients to not delay care.
- Share consistent messages reinforcing and encouraging patients and communities to follow public health guidelines.
- Coordinate with local and state legislators.