

# COVID-19 TALKING POINTS

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## HOSPITAL PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE

New York's hospitals have strong systems in place to quickly identify and isolate patients who meet risk factors for any emerging infectious disease, including COVID-19. The lessons learned from previous infectious disease outbreaks—including H1N1, Ebola, Zika, and SARS—have greatly informed and improved their planning.

Hospitals constantly train staff for these situations (protocols and procedures to safeguard health care workers, patients, and visitors).

Hospitals rely on clinical guidance from City, State, and Federal public health agencies to better determine who may be a "patient under investigation" (PUI) for COVID-19.

Hospitals are smartly conserving supplies such as N95 respirators, surgical masks, and other personal protective equipment (PPE) and using safe/appropriate alternative products.

The health care workforce must be prioritized for PPE supplies. Health care workers must be protected and *feel* protected to do their jobs effectively.

Hospitals are ramping up their patient surge plans. For emergency departments (EDs) this includes alternative triaging practices and using alternative spaces to treat those who are less sick.

Hospitals are also identifying ways to surge critical care areas to care for larger numbers of patients.

## PUBLIC HEALTH

Everyone should practice good respiratory hygiene. Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue or sleeve, not your hands. Wash your hands often with soap and water. Use alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.

You do *not* need to go to a hospital ED unless your illness is severe. Only seriously ill persons should seek care at a hospital.

If you develop severe symptoms such as deep chest pain or difficulty breathing, contact your health care provider right away. You may need to go to the hospital.

Anyone who experiences symptoms such as a cough, runny nose, or fever should contact their primary care doctor first. Stay home if you are sick, and avoid sick people.

## TESTING

The New York State Department of Health (DOH) has implemented interim guidance for the testing of individuals for COVID-19. Testing will be authorized when:



*GNYHA is a dynamic, constantly evolving center for health care advocacy and expertise, but our core mission—helping hospitals deliver the finest patient care in the most cost-effective way—never changes.*

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- An individual has come within proximate contact (same classroom, office, or gatherings) of another person known to be positive, or
- An individual has traveled to a country that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has issued a Level 2 or Level 3 Travel Health Notice, and shows symptoms of illness, or
- An individual is quarantined (mandatory or precautionary) and has shown symptoms of COVID-19 illness, or
- An individual is symptomatic and has not tested positive for any other infection, or
- Other cases where the facts and circumstances warrant as determined by the treating clinician in consultation with State and local department of health officials

GNYHA strongly supports DOH's guidance for testing individuals for COVID-19. The sensible standards that must be met before an individual can be tested will help ensure that hospitals and public health departments are only testing and caring for those who need it most.

DOH's standards are especially important for as long as testing capacity remains limited.

### **OTHER PARTS OF THE HEALTH CARE SYSTEM**

Under the guidance of public health agencies, all health care stakeholders must work together to deliver high-quality care in the most appropriate setting.

Patients with mild illness should seek care at doctor's offices, primary care clinics, and urgent care centers. Only the seriously ill should seek care at a hospital. This message must be consistently delivered to the public.

### **LONG TERM CARE**

Do not visit loved ones at long term care facilities if you have a cough, runny nose, or fever. Long term care facilities house the most vulnerable populations. The best way to protect them is to stay away if you are sick.

Like hospitals, nursing homes and other long term care facilities rely on clinical guidance from City, State, and Federal public health authorities to better determine who may be a PUI for COVID-19.