These operational considerations for triage should be used in addition to and not as a replacement to routine clinical triage already in place in healthcare facilities.
No Disclosures

- I have no financial relationships with commercial entities producing healthcare related products and/or services.
Objectives

Describe:

- COVID-19 background
- Definition of triage
- What patients can do before and upon arrival to healthcare facility
- What healthcare facilities can do to minimize risk of infection among patients and healthcare workers
- What healthcare workers can do to protect themselves and their patients during triage
- Considerations to maintain healthcare delivery as number of COVID-19 cases increases
COVID-19 background

- Caused by a newly emergent coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2
- Leads to respiratory tract infection, including pneumonia
- Transmitted mainly via respiratory droplets (sneezing, coughing, etc.), but transmission via contaminated surfaces can also occur
What is triage?

- The **sorting out** and **classification** of patients to determine priority of need and proper place of treatment.

- For COVID-19 outbreak, triage is particularly important to **separate patients** likely to be infected with the virus that causes COVID-19.

- Effective triage can **prevent transmission** of the virus that causes COVID-19 to patients and healthcare workers (HCWs).
What Patients Can Do
What patients can do

Inform healthcare providers if they are seeking care for respiratory symptoms

Wear a facemask, if available

Immediately notify registration desk about symptoms

Wash hands at healthcare facility entrance

Carry a tissue or other alternative to cover mouth or nose

Maintain social distance in accordance with WHO recommendations ≥1m
What Healthcare Facilities Can Do
What healthcare facilities (HCFs) can do

- Communicate with patients before arriving for triage
- Set up and equip triage area
- Set up a “respiratory waiting area”
- Establish triage process
- Train staff on infection prevention and control measures including proper use of personal protective equipment

WPRO: The COVID-19 risk communication package for healthcare facilities
Communicate with patients before arriving to HCF

- Establish a hotline for patients to call before arrival to HCF to determine the need for a visit

- Inform general public through mass media about availability of a hotline and the signs and symptoms of COVID-19 that require care

- Consider telemedicine (cell phone videoconference or teleconference) for clinical support
Set up and equip triage area

- Strategically place **clear signs** directing patients with respiratory symptoms to **immediately report** to the registration desk

- If possible, consider having a **separate registration desk** for patients coming in with respiratory symptoms
  - Ensure the signs direct patients to the dedicated registration desk

**STOP!**

If you are experiencing cold or flu symptoms like:
- Fever
- Cough
- Shortness of breath

REPORT immediately to the registration desk!
Visual alerts

Place alerts at the entrance of the facility and in strategic areas (waiting areas or elevators)

Alerts should cover:
- Cough etiquette
- Disposal of contaminated items
- Hand hygiene
Set up and equip triage area

Facemasks and paper tissues at registration desk

Modified from WPRO: The COVID-19 risk communication package for healthcare facilities
Set up and equip triage area

Facemasks and paper tissues at registration desk

A bin with lid for discarding used paper tissues

Modified from WPRO: The COVID-19 risk communication package for healthcare facilities
Set up and equip triage area

Facemasks and paper tissues at registration desk

A bin with lid for discarding used paper tissues

Hand hygiene stations

Modified from WPRO: The COVID-19 risk communication package for healthcare facilities
Set up and equip triage area

- Facemasks and paper tissues at registration desk
- Physical barriers (glass or plastic screens)
- A bin with lid for discarding used paper tissues
- Hand hygiene stations

Modified from WPRO: The COVID-19 risk communication package for healthcare facilities
Triage process

- Assign dedicated clinical staff (physicians or nurses) for physical evaluation of patients presenting with respiratory symptoms at triage
- Train administrative personnel working in the reception area

Standardized triage algorithm

- No or limited COVID-19 community transmission
- Widespread COVID-19 community transmission
Triage Flow for Countries with Widespread Community Transmission
**Triage of patients with suspected COVID-19 infection (widespread community transmission)**

**Identify** signs and symptoms of respiratory infection:
- Fever (>38°C) or history of fever*
- And
- At least 1 sign or symptom of respiratory disease (e.g., cough or shortness of breath)

**Yes**
- Place medical mask on patient

**No**
- Continue with usual triage, assessment and care

**Separate from the rest of the patients:**
- Place the patient in a single-person room with the door closed or in other designated area
- Ensure healthcare personnel (HCP) caring for the patient adhere to Standard, Contact, and Droplet Precautions
- Only essential HCP with designated roles should enter the room and wear appropriate personal protective equipment

**Inform**
- Notify the hospital infection control program and other appropriate staff

*Elderly people may not develop fever, but new-onset of cough or worsening respiratory symptoms*
Triage process

- Follow the appropriate triage algorithm
- Give a facemask to patients with respiratory symptoms
- Immediately isolate/separate patients at high risk for COVID-19 in:
  - single-person rooms with doors closed
  OR
  - designated “respiratory waiting areas”
- Limit the number of accompanying family members in the waiting area
Designated “respiratory waiting area”

A separate, well-ventilated area where patients at high risk for COVID-19 can wait

This area should have:

- Benches, stalls or chairs separated by at least one-meter distance
- Dedicated toilets and hand hygiene stations
- Paper tissue, alcohol-based hand sanitizer, and trash bin with lid
- Clear signs informing the location of “respiratory waiting areas”

Modified from WPRO: The COVID-19 risk communication package for healthcare facilities
What Healthcare Workers Can Do
Infection prevention and control precautions

- Adhere to **Standard Precautions**
- Be trained on and familiar with **Contact** and **Droplet Precautions**
- Ensure that environmental **cleaning and disinfection procedures** are followed consistently and correctly
- **Stay home** if develop fever and/or respiratory symptoms (cough, shortness of breath)
Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

- HCWs who do **not** come in contact with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 patients

**No PPE required**
- Physical barrier AND
- Physical distance of at least 1 m

**Use mask and eye protection**
- No physical barrier AND
- Physical distance is not feasible

Glass or plastic barrier

Face shield or goggles

Facemask
Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

- HCWs who come in contact with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 patients should wear appropriate PPE

Modified from WPRO: The COVID-19 risk communication package for healthcare facilities
Important Measures During Periods of COVID-19 Community Transmission
Strategies to avoid overcrowding at triage and preserve PPE

- **Cancel non-urgent outpatient visits** to ensure enough HCWs are available to provide support for COVID-19 clinical care, including triage services
  - If outpatient visit is critical (such as immunization of infants or pre-natal care for high-risk pregnancy), identify a separate/dedicated entrance for these patients
  - Reinforce telemedicine or other alternative to face-to-face visit

- **Postpone or cancel elective procedures and surgeries** to minimize exposures and to preserve PPE for HCWs caring for COVID-19 patients

- **Expand hours of operation**, if possible, to limit crowding in triage during peak hours
Respiratory evaluation centers

- Designate an area near the facility where patients with fever or respiratory symptoms can seek evaluation and care
  - Individuals with mild symptoms should be encouraged to self-isolate and only seek care if symptoms worsen
Reference

For more information, contact CDC
1-800-CDC-INFO (232-4636)

The findings and conclusions in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.