

COVID-19 Communications Toolkit

March 2020

Please note: In the interest of supporting our partners and the industry as a whole, HealthPRO Heritage offers this resource to help strengthen your preparedness efforts. Information and resources contained herein does not constitute formal legal advice and should be customized to align with each individual community's policies, procedures and unique circumstances.

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Introduction

Overview

The COVID-19 virus has reached pandemic status and is receiving constant attention from media outlets large and small. The virus outbreak is a global health issue that poses major reputational risks for any organization that neglects to establish proper operational and communications protocols.

During this time of great challenge, HealthPRO® Heritage has assembled a communications toolkit for partners to aid any potential need and ensure that our teams work together, share consistent messaging and serve as your true partner. Alignment is key to protecting our customers, employees and reputations during this trying time.

The following COVID-19 communications plan is designed to help your team handle a COVID-19 situation effectively and ensure:

- » Facts are communicated clearly, effectively and at the right time;
- » Communication efforts are organized and coordinated; and
- » The impact of the issue is neutral at worst – and in some cases, may even serve to have a positive impact on our reputation and trust with key stakeholders.

In this plan, you will find step-by-step processes and templated tools and materials to assist with managing through a COVID-19 event. **It has been specifically tailored to help in the scenario of an employee, patient, resident or visitor testing positive for the virus**, depending on what is applicable to your company. The following document contains:

- » Media protocol
- » Escalation process
- » Communications strategy
- » Talking points/FAQs
- » Internal/external memos
- » Media/social media statements

In the event of a positive COVID-19 test that your company faces with any of the identified audiences, please follow these guidelines and take advantage of the following tools.

Media Protocol

This media protocol is designed to help you direct potential media requests regarding a COVID-19 issue. Please consider it a resource and follow the directions below.

Handling Media: Phone Calls

All employees who answer phones must know and feel comfortable with this process.

1. If a reporter calls, thank him or her for the call, inform him or her about your privacy policy (if applicable) and obtain the following information:
 - Name
 - Media outlet (newspaper, magazine, TV/radio station)
 - Deadline for obtaining information
 - Contact information
2. Tell the reporter that you will pass on this information to the appropriate person and that we will get back with him or her promptly.
3. Immediately provide all collected information (regardless of if you were able to collect everything) to **your manager, who will involve your leadership team**. Be sure to reach out via email and a phone call (please **do NOT** simply leave a voicemail or message if they do not respond).

Contact: Name | Phone | Email

Handling Media: Onsite Presence

If a reporter or camera crew arrives onsite, firmly, but politely, ask them to wait until a spokesperson can speak with them, either in person or on the phone. Obtain the aforementioned information in step one and alert your manager immediately following the same protocol outlined above.

Additional Media Tips

Media Interaction Do's & Don'ts	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">» Do treat media with respect» Do take down reporter's name, outlet, email address, phone number and the question/nature of the request and notify your manager» Do let the reporter know someone will be in touch	<ul style="list-style-type: none">» Don't say no comment – Instead, take the reporter's information and let him or her know someone will be in contact shortly» Don't answer any questions without official guidance from corporate communications» Don't be reactive

Escalation Process

The following escalation process is designed to guide you through the steps to take upon a confirmed COVID-19 case. Please follow the steps below to ensure the right individuals are notified.

- » Collect all possible information on the case to report to your manager.
- » Notify key stakeholders of situation immediately following using communications strategy for internal and external audiences.
- » Identify, notify and prepare clinical or operational spokesperson/s for media inquiries.
- » To maintain trust, proactively communicate appropriate details with any other key audiences.
- » In cases of media inquiries, refer to the media protocol for guidance. In preparation, consider:
 - Preparing reactive media statement using the following template below.
 - Only reacting to media requests; do not proactively engage media.

Tools and Templates

Scenario

A(n) [EMPLOYEE/PATIENT/STUDENT/RESIDENT/VISITOR] of [LOCATION] tests positive for COVID-19.

Areas of Vulnerability

- » Safety of employees, patients, students, residents and visitors
- » Damage to your image/reputation, depending how the event is managed
- » Reduced operational capacity

Prioritized Audiences

Internal	External
<ul style="list-style-type: none">» Senior leadership» Employees» Patients/students/residents» Partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none">» Media» Visitors» Family members» Community members» Elected Officials

Communications Strategy

We recommend a communications strategy that includes the following elements:

Proactive Internal Approach

- » Notify senior leadership immediately upon becoming aware that one of your [EMPLOYEE/PATIENT/STUDENT/RESIDENT/VISITOR] has tested positive for COVID-19.
- » To maintain trust, proactively communicate appropriate details with key audiences.
 - Communicate in-person with the most impacted employees and follow-up in writing to ensure details are understood.
 - Communicate in writing with all other employees.
- » Leverage the following templated materials:
 - Internal memo
 - Talking points
 - FAQs

Proactive, Coordinated External Approach

- » Proactively communicate with individuals who may have been on-site with or interacted with the affected [EMPLOYEE/PATIENT/STUDENT/RESIDENT/VISITOR].
- » Take a “proactively reactive” media approach and stand prepared to comment if needed.
 - Prepare the below templated reactive media statement.
 - Identify and train a clinical or operational spokesperson/s to respond to media inquiries.
 - Only react to media requests; do not proactively engage media.
- » Leverage the following developed materials:
 - External memo
 - Talking points
 - FAQs
 - Reactive media & social statements

Talking Points

The following talking points have been developed to guide your organization through communicating during a COVID-19 positive test scenario. Please note that these may need to be adjusted on a case-by-case basis.

Positioned to Serve & Protect our Employees, Patients and Visitors

- » We continue to see the number of COVID-19 cases around the world grow and the number of people affected in our area continues to rise.
- » We value the health and well-being of our [EMPLOYEES/PATIENTS/RESIDENTS/STUDENTS/VISITORS] and the general public during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- » The safety of our employees and [PATIENTS/RESIDENTS/STUDENTS/VISITORS] is paramount as we fulfill our mission to serve all of those in our community who need us.
- » As always, we will be transparent with our employees, [PATIENTS/RESIDENTS/STUDENTS] and their loved ones.

What You Need to Know

- » We recently learned that a(n) [EMPLOYEE/PATIENT/RESIDENT/STUDENT/VISITOR] at [LOCATION] has tested positive for COVID-19. The person is currently in quarantine at home/in a local hospital in accordance with the procedures and protocols established by the CDC and the [LOCAL CITY/TOWN/COUNTY] Department of Health.
 - We cannot comment on the specifics around the person's condition but can confirm that we are working in close coordination with state and local health officials to follow the protocols in-place to halt and minimize the spread of the virus.
 - The person, who [insert details that will be in the media statement – age, how they were exposed, etc.], will continue to be monitored.
- » We have taken a number of steps to ensure we were prepared to support anyone impacted by the virus. It proved extremely valuable when our [EMPLOYEE/PATIENT/RESIDENT/STUDENT/VISITOR] tested positive.
 - List here the efforts your organization has taken, which may include:*
 - We have routinely communicated with our team members to reinforce safety protocols.
 - We continue to follow each of them and remain focused on the safety of our employees, and [PATIENTS/RESIDENTS/STUDENTS] and visitors.
 - We have kept a close eye on our stock of critical supplies, such as personal protective equipment, which is vital to keeping our team members, other patients and visitors safe when in contact with someone affected by the virus.

Safety Protocols

Note: the following are examples and should be edited to match your efforts.

- » The health and safety of our [PATIENTS/RESIDENTS/STUDENTS], visitors and employees are our top priorities. We are committed to evaluating our own policies and making necessary adjustments to maximize their safety.
- » Every [PATIENT/RESIDENT/STUDENT]-facing team member across our organization took part in training specific to COVID-19.
- » We have contacted all team members, [PATIENTS/RESIDENT/STUDENTS/VISITORS] who may have been in contact with the affected [EMPLOYEE/PATIENT/RESIDENT/STUDENT/VISITOR].

We encourage these individuals to continue monitoring for COVID-19 symptoms and take the appropriate steps to contain spread of the virus.

- » We have been in close contact with the CDC and the [CITY/TOWN/COUNTY] Department of Public Health throughout this process and will continue to work with them moving forward. We are following the instructed guidelines to maintain the health and safety of both our patients and the community.
- » We have procedures and protocols established to effectively and efficiently manage an affected person.
 - These include immediate isolation, assessing the person's healthcare needs and directing/helping them to be tested if needed.
- » We encourage everyone to take the necessary precautions recommended by the CDC and public health officials (through handwashing, proper disinfection, covering coughs and sneezes, etc.) to prevent the spread of this pandemic.

Continuing to Care for Our Community

Note: the following are examples and should be edited to match your efforts.

- » As always, our focus remains providing our [PATIENTS/RESIDENTS/STUDENTS] with exceptional healthcare services. **If applicable:** We continue to operate as usual, and with added caution, to meet the community's needs.
- » We are committed to providing our [PATIENTS/RESIDENTS/STUDENTS], community, partners and team members with the information and care they need to stay healthy.
- » **If applicable:** All locations, including [FACILITY NAME] remain open to [PATIENTS/RESIDENTS/STUDENTS]. Anyone in need of our services should continue to utilize this facility.
- » We know we share the same goal of serving our community and are happy to provide any additional details or answer any questions you might have.
- » Together, we will continue to deliver our services to the individuals and communities who need us.
- » We are committed to keeping our [PATIENTS/RESIDENTS/STUDENTS], communities and partners updated as we go forward.
- » We look forward to working together to continue to protect the health of our friends, families and neighbors.

Frequently Asked Questions

The following FAQs have been developed to provide answers to potential questions you may receive from either internal or external audiences.

Universal Questions

1. What happened?

- » A(n) [EMPLOYEE/PATIENT/RESIDENT/STUDENT/VISITOR] of our facility has tested positive for COVID-19. [Your response to this question should be as factual as possible and should keep you in alignment with contracted partners, local officials and others. Explain how the team member came into contact with the virus, be it through travel, treating a patient or otherwise. If you do not know, do not guess.]

2. Am I at risk for contracting COVID-19?

- » We have sanitized the facility as instructed and followed every safety protocol. While all of our team members and [PATIENTS/RESIDENTS/STUDENTS] remain safe, we encourage everyone to take the necessary precautions recommended by the CDC and public health officials (through handwashing, proper disinfection, covering coughs and sneezes, etc.) to prevent the spread of the virus.

3. How has your facility prepared?

- » We planned ahead for the current flu season and have adequate supplies for the foreseeable future. To stay prepared, we are carefully monitoring volumes of key personal protection equipment (PPE) and have been carefully following all CDC procedures and protocols.

4. What guidance is available for home quarantine and isolation?

- » The CDC has guidance on this topic found at the website:
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/guidance-home-care.html>

Team Member-Specific Questions

1. Are we still supporting new/existing [PATIENTS/RESIDENTS/STUDENTS]?

- » [Your response to this question should be as empathetic as possible and should keep you in alignment with contracted partners, local officials and others. Consider all stakeholders upon deciding whether to suspend operations at any facilities and/or suspend patient care.]

2. What can I do to prevent the spread of COVID-19 within our network and amongst our patients, residents or visitors?

- » Wash your hands often and disinfect your workspace – and any common areas – with disinfecting sprays or wipes. Please stay home if you are sick and, if you need to cough or sneeze, please do so into your elbow.

3. A(n) [EMPLOYEE/PATIENT/RESIDENT/STUDENT] in my building is infected, what should I do? How do I manage it?

- » Continue following the CDC-approved protocols we have been practicing and enforcing thus far, as well as isolation and quarantine procedures for individuals as needed. Wash your hands often and disinfect any common areas with disinfecting sprays or wipes as warranted. If you need to cough or sneeze, please do so into your elbow. Reach out to

leadership with questions on protocols or any out-of-the-norm situations that should arise and be sure report suspected cases of COVID-19 as per protocol.

Patient/Resident/Visitor-Specific Questions

1. **A(n) [EMPLOYEE/PATIENT/RESIDENT/STUDENT] of my/my loved one's building is infected, what should I do? How do I manage it?**
 - » Continue to practice social distancing, as well as isolation and quarantine procedures as needed. Visitor policies will likely become more limited. Wash your hands often and disinfect your living space and common areas with disinfecting sprays or wipes. If you need to cough or sneeze, please do so into your elbow. Our care teams and staff will also continue to follow CDC approved protocols for disinfection and will support you with this.

2. **Why can't you tell me more about the [EMPLOYEE/PATIENT(S)/RESIDENT(S)/STUDENT(S)] with COVID-19?**
 - » We must protect patient privacy at all times in accordance with our privacy policies, including HIPAA. I can only confirm there has been a confirmed case in a(n) [EMPLOYEE/PATIENT/RESIDENT/STUDENT] at [FACILITY NAME] and our team is taking the necessary measures to keep our team members, patients and others safe.

3. **Why can't I visit my loved ones at this time? Why did you change your visitor policy?**
 - » In protection of our [EMPLOYEES/PATIENTS/RESIDENTS/STUDENTS], we have limited our visitation policies to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus. We encourage you to connect with them virtually, by phone, video or in writing, during this time of social distancing.

Internal Memo

To be used as a proactive communication tool with identified internal audiences upon a confirmed COVID-19 case.

[DATE]

Fellow Team Members,

As you know, COVID-19 continues to affect a growing number of people in the U.S. and around the world. You all have been vigilant serving our patients as our communities endure the pandemic. Thank you.

We have learned that one of our [EMPLOYEES/PATIENTS/RESIDENTS/STUDENTS/VISITORS] at [FACILITY NAME] has tested positive for COVID-19. The person is currently in quarantine at home/in a local hospital in accordance with the procedures and protocols established by the CDC and the [LOCAL CITY/TOWN/COUNTY] Department of Health. We cannot comment on the specifics around the person's condition but can confirm that we are working in close coordination with state and local health officials to follow the protocols in-place to halt and minimize the spread of the virus.

The individual will continue to be monitored.

I am very proud of the way our team prepared in anticipation of this incident and in protection of our community. We have sharpened our skills through training and continue to keep a close eye on critical supplies. But I am most focused on you, our most important resources.

Your health and safety remain our top priorities. [Insert details re: childcare access, policy updates re: sick/vacation time and flexible work options]. Remember to use all recommended protection materials, wash your hands even more often than usual and stay home if you are sick. I know you are committed to going above and beyond to provide care, but please remember to also take care of yourself.

If you receive questions from patients/residents, family members, other students or members of the community, please reference the attached FAQ document. If you are approached by a member of the media, please notify [NAME] at [EMAIL] or [PHONE].

Lastly, I want to thank you for all you continue to do for our patients and each other – for every person, every time. Together, we fulfill our mission to serve all of those in our community who need us.

Your dedication and compassion have not gone unnoticed and are sincerely appreciated.

Sincerely,

[LEADER NAME]

External Memo

To be used as a proactive communication tool with identified external audiences upon a confirmed COVID-19 case.

[DATE]

To our valued [PATIENTS/RESIDENTS/VISITORS/STUDENTS/FAMILIES],

As you know, COVID-19 continues to affect a growing number of people in the U.S. and around the world. This is a time of great uncertainty we appreciate your patience as we navigate the situation together.

We have learned that one of our [EMPLOYEES/PATIENTS/RESIDENTS/STUDENTS/VISITORS] has tested positive for COVID-19. The individual is currently in quarantine at home/in a local hospital in accordance with the procedures and protocols established by the CDC and the [LOCAL CITY/TOWN/COUNTY] Department of Health. We cannot comment on the specifics around their condition but can confirm that we are working in close coordination with state and local health officials to follow the protocols in-place to halt and minimize the spread of the virus. They will continue to be monitored.

In recent weeks, our team has taken numerous steps to protect our [PATIENTS/RESIDENTS/STUDENTS], their loved ones and our employees. Every [PATIENT/RESIDENT/STUDENT]-facing team member across our organization took part in training specific to COVID-19. We encourage everyone to continue monitoring for COVID-19 symptoms and take the appropriate steps to contain spread of the virus.

We are committed to working in close coordination with state and local health officials to follow the protocols in place to halt and minimize the spread of the virus. We believe in being as proactive as possible in our efforts to minimize the spread of COVID-19, which includes communications efforts.

We understand that this situation is constantly evolving and is generating ongoing questions from [PATIENTS/RESIDENTS/STUDENTS], their loved ones and members of the community broadly. We welcome the opportunity to work with you to address these questions as they arise. Please feel free to reach out to discuss at any time: [NAME] at [EMAIL] or [PHONE].

We are committed to keeping our [PATIENTS/RESIDENTS/STUDENTS], visitors and families updated as we go forward. We know we share the same goal of serving our community and together, we will continue to deliver our services to the individuals who need us.

Sincerely,

LEADER NAME

Media Holding Statement

This statement should be used reactively upon a media inquiry.

We can confirm that a(n) [EMPLOYEE/PATIENT/RESIDENT/STUDENT/VISITOR] of [LOCATION] has tested positive for COVID-19. We are positioned to ensure that this patient receives high-quality care and that our team members and other patients remain safe. Across our organization, we have conducted clinical training and have closely monitored the supply of vital supplies like personal protective equipment. **NOTE: Fact-check:** Our locations remain open to our patients.

We continue to follow the guidance, procedures and protocols established by the CDC and the [LOCAL CITY/TOWN/COUNTY] Department of Health. We will work closely with these organizations moving forward to provide the best care and prevention information to our community and team members.

Social Media Statements

These statements can be posted to Facebook, Twitter and/or LinkedIn upon active news coverage. These platforms should be monitored closely and with teams prepared to respond to comments and/or questions as appropriate.

Facebook

We have learned that a(n) [EMPLOYEE/PATIENT/RESIDENT/STUDENT/VISITOR] at our [LOCATION] has tested positive for COVID-19. The person is currently in quarantine at home/in a local hospital and receiving the highest quality care all while keeping others safe, in accordance with the procedures and protocols established by the CDC and the [LOCAL CITY/TOWN/COUNTY] Department of Health.

We are committed to providing our community, partners and team members with both updates on this situation and the information and care they need to stay healthy. All locations, including [FACILITY NAME], remain open at this time. We know we share the same goal of serving our community and are happy to answer any questions you might have as a(n) [EMPLOYEE/PATIENT/RESIDENT/STUDENT/VISITOR].

Twitter

A(n) [EMPLOYEE/PATIENT/RESIDENT/STUDENT/VISITOR] of our [LOCATION] has tested positive for COVID-19. We've confirmed that our facility's team members and [PATIENTS/RESIDENTS/STUDENTS] remain safe.

We are committed to providing our entire community with updates and the info they need to stay healthy as this situation evolves.