

March 26, 2020

Guidelines for transporting COVID-19 patients from Intermountain Healthcare facilities

To expedite safe, efficient, and appropriate transfer of COVID-19 patients, we are issuing the following guidelines:

TRANSPORT DECISION

- **CRITICAL:** Make transport decision regarding COVID-19 patients quickly to avoid further decompensation and deterioration of patient's condition.
- Coordinate all inter-hospital transfers through the Intermountain Transfer Center (ITC).
- Less time spent in the transferring facility will mean less risk of contamination of the ED and ED personnel.
- Stable versus unstable transport:
 - A stable but sick COVID-19 patient needing higher level of care is likely appropriate for transfer.
 - A non-stable COVID-19 patient may need to be stabilized prior to transport. If stable on pressors or other meds, they may still be appropriate for transfer.
 - Transfer appropriateness will need to be determined by the ED provider.

LEVEL OF CARE NEEDED

- In the majority of COVID -19 cases needing transport, Advance Life Support personnel will be required in case of decompensation of the patient.
- Many small rural agencies have advanced EMTs rather than paramedics. Advanced EMTs can manage airway, however they are only approved to administer a limited number of medications. They are likely able to manage a moderately ill patient.
- Advanced EMTs may not be appropriate depending on the condition of the patient. If a higher level of care is deemed necessary, air ambulance transfer will likely be required.

COVID-19 SPECIFIC TRANSPORT CONCERNS

- **Non-intubated patient:** Risk of droplet contact with non-intubated patient.
- **Patient requiring oxygen:** Consider nasal canula when possible to avoid possible aerosolization and droplet spread within an oxygen mask.
- **Patient requiring bronchodilator:** Nebulizer treatments will put the crew at greater risk of airborne exposure.
- **Ventilator dependent:** Some smaller agencies may not have ventilator capability.
- **Hemodynamic instability:** This will present a challenge especially with longer transport. Consider stabilizing patient prior to transfer while maintaining isolation.

COORDINATING TRANSPORT TIME

- Once transport decision is made, coordinate the transport to eliminate the transporting agency having to wait in the ED for extended periods of time. Consider the time needed for the transport agency to arrive at the facility when coordinating transport.
- If transport is determined immediately to be needed, call the transporting agency and ask for an ETA and coordinate times with them to minimize time transferring crew waits in the ED for the patient to be ready.

TRANSPORT DISTANCE/TIME

- Please consider the distance/time of transport, when making transport decision. For a very high-risk, potentially unstable patient, shorter transport times will lead to less exposure to the transporting crew.
- Ground transport should likely only be used for those taking 30-60 minutes or less, otherwise air transport may be more appropriate.

DISPATCH INFORMATION

- When speaking with dispatch, please advise them this is a patient with known COVID-19 or person under investigation (PUI).
- Notify dispatch of all the necessary medical equipment, ventilators, medication pumps, personal protective equipment (PPE), etc.

AIR AMBULANCES

- All potential air ambulance transports need to be coordinated through the Intermountain Transfer Center (ITC)
- As numbers of COVID positive and critically ill patients increase throughout Utah, undoubtedly air ambulances will be stretched thin resulting in increased wait times for transfer by air ambulance.

AIRWAY CONCERNS

- If advanced airway is required, or anticipated, please secure airway prior to transferring the patient to avoid having to secure an advanced airway in the confined space of an ambulance or air ambulance.

PPE CONCERNS

- Please advise the transporting crew dispatch of the PPE required during transport as soon as that is established. Most agencies will not readily have PAPR available and may need to gather appropriate PPE. This will prevent having to call another crew with appropriate PPE.
- Please be aware rural transporting agencies will likely have much less variety and possibly availability of PPE.

INTERFACE WITH TRANSPORTING CREW

- The goal is for EMS to be in the ED the shortest amount of time possible to avoid further contamination.
- When giving patient report to transporting agency, do so outside of the patient isolation room to minimize exposure.
- Observe, encourage, and ensure transporting agency has proper PPE donned prior to entering the patient room or any patient contact.
- If air ambulance, we recommend the pilot remain outside the hospital to minimize exposure.

If you have questions regarding these guidelines, please contact Jay Thomas or Fernando Rivero.

Sincerely,

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