EMS Policy Memorandum No. 2020-05

DATE: March 16, 2020

TO: Valley Regional Emergency Communications Center and Personnel
    Stockton Fire Department Emergency Communications Center and Personnel
    Prehospital Service Providers and Personnel
    Base Hospital Personnel
    Emergency Department Physicians and Nurse Liaisons

FROM: Katherine Shafer, M.D., EMS Medical Director

SUBJ.: Coronavirus (COVID-19) Medical Direction

This memorandum supersedes EMS Policy Memorandum No. 2020-04. The purpose of this memorandum is to provide guidance and medical direction for EMD call processing, responding to and treatment of patients with suspected Coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms, and for enhancing safety of prehospital care personnel and patients. It is the responsibility of all dispatch, transport, and non-transport service providers to ensure that their personnel receive this information.

San Joaquin County Public Health Services (SJCPHS) has confirmed the community transmission of COVID-19 in San Joaquin County.

Since January 27, 2020, I have chosen to be proactive and assumed community spread was present. Accordingly, I have already asked all personnel to don full PPE (gloves, gowns, NIOSH-certified fit-tested N95 respirator, and eye protection) with any respiratory illness to get ahead of the curve on exposure. I took this action because I never believed that EMD screening for travel or other exposure information was sufficient to protect personnel and patients when there was an assumed community transmission which had not been confirmed.

I am continuing my direction that all prehospital care personnel operate under the assumption that any patient with signs and symptoms of a respiratory illness potentially has a COVID-19 infection or other airborne or droplet transmissible disease. Symptoms of COVID-19 are similar to influenza like illness (ILI). These symptoms include: fever, difficulty breathing, cough, and potentially other mild to severe respiratory symptoms including pneumonia.

EMD Call Screening: Several prehospital service providers and prehospital care personnel have expressed concern on being dispatched to non-respiratory calls with COVID-19 positive patients - which I believe is the concern about not screening. Based on those concerns, this is where I am. First, caller screening questions in other systems have primarily been focused
on patients exhibiting respiratory illness symptoms who then meet high risk criteria. This approach is no longer valid at this point given that we already have community transmission in San Joaquin County and throughout California.

Second, deviating from established caller interrogation questions may have unintended consequences, especially when using leading questions. Nonetheless, in order to ensure that responding personnel have the most accurate and up-to-date information available I am issuing the following directions:

- EMD call takers and dispatchers shall notify responding personnel. This includes if a caller self identifies as: 1) having a positive COVID-19 test; 2) being exposed to a person with a positive COVID-19 test; or 3) if the patient is a person under investigation.
- Dispatchers shall alert responding personnel of this information regardless of the incident type.

Donning PPE for COVID Positive Patients:

There are limited supplies of PPE. Persons exposed to a COVID-19 positive patient but are currently themselves non-symptomatic are considered low risk. I have been discussing recommendations for conserving PPE with the Public Health Officer, Dr. Park. We agree this is the best approach to protecting crews and patients in light of current information and considering the limited supply of PPE. Therefore, I am directing all prehospital personnel to use PPE as follows:

- Crews should don full PPE for any COVID-19 positive patient even if the patient has no signs or symptoms of illness and even if the call for service is not related to a respiratory illness.
- Crews should don full PPE for patient presenting with signs or symptoms of COVID-19 or influenza like illness.
- Crews should NOT don full PPE for a patient that states they were exposed to a COVID-19 positive person unless the patient has signs and symptoms including cough, fever or shortness of breath.

Additionally, Cal OSHA and CDC have issued guidance recommending engineering controls to limit the exposure of Health Care Personnel. The guidance is available on the Cal OSHA and CDC websites. In summary, you should consider the following:

- Limiting the number of personnel making initial patient contact for low acuity and non-life threatening incidents. This will allow the attending paramedic or EMT to obtain a patient history and determine the need for and level of PPE required, and the need for additional prehospital care personnel to assist with care and treatment.
- For high risk procedures such as intubation ensure that all prehospital care personnel caring for the patient have full PPE or remain six feet distance away during the high risk procedure.
Do Not Place N95/P100 Masks on Patients:
There have been some crews placing N95 and P100 masks on patients. Do not do this. These masks are more restrictive to patient’s breathing and should only be used by healthcare personnel. Surgical masks should be placed on patients. If there are no surgical masks available prehospital personnel should offer a towel for patients to cough into to help decrease droplet transmission. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC), states that the World Health Organization (WHO) data has shown the risk to healthcare personnel to still be low as long as personnel are using full PPE.

Decontamination and Clean Up:
It is important that prehospital personnel are extra diligent with the cleaning and disinfecting of equipment and vehicles as there is increased risk for droplet deposits.

Resource requesting:
As the Medical Health Operational Area Coordinator (MHOAC) program lead, the SJCEMSA coordinates all medical and health mutual aid resource requests within San Joaquin County.

The California Department of Public Health (CDPH) has a mutual cache of N-95 respirators available to counties, to help supplement the normal PPE supply chain.

Detailed information on how to request PPE resources is available on the SJEMSA website, see the links below:
- https://www.sjgov.org/ems/videos/How_to_Request_MH_MA_PPE.mp4

Things are changing rapidly and SJCEMSA is working closely with SJCPhS to have a cohesive strategy on mitigating this disease. It is my goal to keep everyone updated as often as needed. Please also keep yourselves and your crews informed by frequently visiting the websites of EMS, PH, and the CDC.

If you have any questions regarding this memorandum you may direct questions to me through Matt Esposito, Prehospital Care Coordinator mesposito@sjgov.org or (209) 468-6818.