

SUBJECT: **TREAT AND REFER FOR MILD RESPIRATORY
ILLNESS DURING THE COVID-19 OUTBREAK**

PURPOSE: To guide the evaluation and transport decisions for patients experiencing mild respiratory illness during the COVID-19 pandemic.

AUTHORITY: California Health and Safety code 1797.94, 1797.153, and 101310

PRINCIPLES:

1. Los Angeles County is experiencing an outbreak of the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) – 2 coronavirus known as COVID-19.
2. Based on the current outbreak, most infected persons experience mild illness and fully recover. Those at high risk for severe illness and/or complications are patients who are elderly or have underlying medical conditions. However, some persons with no underlying illness will have a severe disease course.
3. Patients with COVID-19 may look comfortable and have relatively little dyspnea despite significant hypoxia.
4. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that low-risk patients potentially infected with COVID-19 experiencing mild disease self-isolate at home unless symptoms worsen.
5. Other respiratory illnesses such as influenza may present similarly, but for low-risk patients without signs of severe illness, the recommendations are the same.
6. EMS personnel shall wear appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) at all times when in contact with a patient with a potential infectious disease.

DEFINITION:

Low risk potential COVID-19 patients: Patients greater than 12 months of age and less than 65 years of age with minor respiratory complaints (e.g., cough, sore throat, rhinorrhea) with or without fever, who are ambulatory, not homeless, and have NONE of the following: complaint of shortness of breath or chest pain or syncope, abnormal vital signs for age, history of significant comorbid disease including COPD, CHF, cardiac disease, renal failure, diabetes, pregnancy, immunodeficiency, or emergency medical condition per paramedic judgment.

Emergency Medical Condition: A condition or situation in which a medical illness is suspected in a patient and there is an immediate need for medical attention. Patients with any abnormal vital signs (heart rate and rhythm, respiratory rate, blood pressure, oxygen saturation– except isolated asymptomatic hypertension) and those who meet Base Contact criteria are considered to have an emergency medical condition.

Provider Impression of Cold/Flu: Cold/Flu shall be utilized for minor respiratory illness in a patient without shortness of breath or wheezing; the patient must have normal respiratory rate and oxygen saturation (before and after ambulation).

EFFECTIVE DATE: 12-22-20

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REVISED:

SUPERCEDES:

APPROVED:


Director, EMS Agency


Medical Director, EMS Agency

POLICY:

- I. Low-risk patients with a Primary Provider Impression of Cold/Flu may be considered for Treat and Refer according to this policy. For all other Provider Impressions, this policy does not apply.
- II. A low-risk patient must meet all the conditions as outlined in the definition above, including have normal vital signs per MCG 1380 and NOT have an emergency medical condition.
- III. An assessment shall be performed to ensure the patient meets low-risk criteria prior to advising non-transport.
- IV. In particular, all patients must have a pulse oximetry assessed **with ambulation** and those with an oxygen saturation <94% on room air during an ambulatory trial are NOT low-risk and should be transported.
- V. Providers with end-tidal CO₂ (EtCO₂) monitoring capabilities in the spontaneously ventilating patient should consider this additional assessment for febrile patients. An end-tidal CO₂ reading ≤ 25mmHG supports the provider impression of sepsis. EtCO₂ also provides the most accurate measurement of respiratory rate.
- VI. Low-risk patients with mild symptoms of respiratory infection (e.g., cough, sore throat, rhinorrhea) should be advised that their current condition does not require transport to the emergency department and to isolate at home.

PROCEDURE:

- I. EMS providers may use this tool to guide evaluation and transport decisions for patients experiencing mild respiratory illness possibly related to COVID-19.
 - A. Paramedic shall assess and evaluate the patient using all the criteria listed below.
 - B. If ALL criteria are **Yes (Green)** – the patient meets low-risk criteria and may be advised that their current condition does not require transport to the emergency department.
 - C. If ANY criterion is **No (Red)** – the patient does not meet low-risk criteria and should be transported.

II. **LOW-RISK CRITERIA FOR MILD RESPIRATORY ILLNESS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC:**

Patient presents with mild respiratory symptoms and the Provider Impression is Cold/Flu	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/> *
Age >12 months and <65 years	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
NO Shortness of Breath	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
NO Chest Pain	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
NO Syncope	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
VITAL SIGNS are NORMAL for age per MCG 1380 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adults: SBP ≥90mmHg, HR 60-100, RR 12-20, O₂ ≥94% • Pediatrics: Refer to LA County Color Code for normal ranges 	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Pulse Oximetry ≥94% on room air <u>with ambulation</u>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
NO COPD	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
NO CHF or Cardiac Disease	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
NO Pregnancy	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
NO Renal Failure (not on dialysis)	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
NO Diabetes	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
NO Immunodeficiency (e.g., chemotherapy for cancer, taking steroids, HIV)	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Not Homeless	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
NO Emergent Medical Condition per EMS Provider Judgment	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>

*If No: This protocol does not apply. Refer to Ref 834 for guidance on Treat and Refer.

- III. If the patient meets all criteria above, EMS personnel shall advise the patient directly or via their legal representative to:
 - A. Stay at home, contact their physician for additional advise regarding care, and seek follow-up treatment as needed with their physician if their symptoms worsen.

- B. Isolate themselves at home, apply appropriate social distancing, avoid contact with high-risk persons, and self-monitor their condition for worsening symptoms.
- C. Isolation period should continue until patient is symptom free and cleared by the patient's physician based on current guidelines from the CDC and Los Angeles County Department of Public Health.
- D. Provide a hardcopy or refer the patient to access the Home Care Instructions for People with Respiratory Symptoms at:

English

<http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/acd/docs/COVHomeCare.pdf>

Spanish

<http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/acd/docs/COVHomeCareSpanish.pdf>

- IV. The advice given should be documented on the Patient Care Record. The following statement is recommended:

“It appears that you do not require immediate care in the emergency department. You should seek care with your regular healthcare provider or a doctor’s office or clinic if symptoms worsen. If you develop shortness of breath or other severe symptoms, recontact 9-1-1.”

- V. EMS personnel should not require patients released at scene, including those treated and referred, to sign the release (AMA) section of the Patient Care Record, as this implies that the patient is at significant risk by not utilizing the EMS system for treatment and/or transportation.
- VI. If the patient or the patient’s legal representative requests that the patient be transported after assurance that the transport is not needed, EMS personnel should honor the request and transport the patient.
 - E. EMS personnel transporting patients with suspected COVID-19 shall notify the receiving facility in advance prior to arrival and may be directed to a screening area other than the emergency department.
 - F. EMS personnel who are assessing, treating or transporting a patient with suspected COVID-19 shall use appropriate PPE at all times to include a N95 mask, gown, gloves and eye protection. Additionally, place a surgical mask on the patient. Refer to TP 1245.