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New Protocols

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Hi All,

Thanks to Karin's idea of posting on NextDoor app and Don's idea to extend that to our social media, we've had some surgical mask donations in the past few days. Hopefully they continue to trickle in. We still don't have enough masks (especially N95s) so please reach out and share those posts to have more coming in. In addition, if people cannot donate masks, you can ask for gowns, hand sanitizer, soap, paper towels, bleach, sanitary wipes, and/or other decontamination supplies that you think we may need. If you collect a donation of any sort from someone, please get their contact information so I can keep a track of it. It would be nice to send them a thank you of some sort when all this blows over.

As for our protocols, due to the way things are progressing since I last sent a protocol email, we will have to increase our protection levels so that we are not being compromised. As an update, there have been two POTENTIAL cases at Merwick, one POTENTIAL case at 1000 Windrows, and one POTENTIAL case at 2000 Windrows so far. All of these are unconfirmed at this time, but we should start taking precaution while going to these places and going to calls in general.

With that said, every provider will wear an N95 (green cup style mask) on EVERY CALLS ALONG WITH A SURGICAL MASK ON TOP of that. Size yourself for an appropriate green cup style N95 mask so you know what size you need. Normally, we would be fit testing people but we don't have enough masks to fit test everybody who have never been fit tested so we will have to make do with a best fit mask at this time unfortunately. After non-COVID related calls, you will KEEP the N95 and DISCARD the surgical mask. On the next call, you will wear the SAME N95 and a NEW surgical mask on top of that. N95s are reusable up to a max of 5 times as per CDC. After any COVID related calls, you are to discard the N95 as well as the surgical mask (even if the N95 hasn't been worn for 5 times). A COVID related call is any call that you would need to inform me about or write a special report about. If it sounds like COVID, but you get there and it's not, then you may reuse the N95 mask for the next call.

For Merwick, Windrows, all nursing home/rehab facilities outside of Plainsboro (any mutual aid), and any potential COVID calls (or unknown calls) outside of these facilities, our new protocol is to go with full precautions which includes GLOVES, GOWN, N95, SAFETY GLASSES, AND SURGICAL MASK FOR US and also a SURGICAL MASK FOR THE PATIENT to suppress aerosolization of respiratory droplets.

When you go to the Squad next time, pick up a Ziploc from the supply room and size yourself for the appropriate N95 mask. Place your N95 in the Ziploc and place 5 surgical masks (blue) in there for your personal use. This way, once you run out of surgical masks in your Ziploc, you know it's time to switch up the N95 mask as well. This is how I recommend doing it but you're free to do it a different way. I highly recommend storing your masks in a sealed Ziploc when not in use so that they don't get exposed to the environment more than they need to and therefore stay as "clean" as possible. Realistically, who know how much of this virus is hanging around in the air with how prevalent it is. Make sure that wherever you store them, that they do not bend the N95 mask. A bent N95 mask doesn't maintain a proper seal and you are more prone to contracting the infection so maintain its structural integrity so that it works the way it's supposed to. Also, get rid of your facial hair so that it forms a proper seal with your face. If your facial hair gets in the way, it may not form a proper seal at which point, wearing a mask is useless.

Wear gloves to everything. Wear gloves as soon as you enter the house or facility. Don't touch elevator buttons, open doors, and other things without gloves on (especially if the patient is at Merwick or Windrows). And wash your hands as often as possible or use sanitizer if you cannot wash your hands.

Bring an extra set of clothes with you on the ambulance and switch into them at the hospital for any suspected COVID patient. Bring an extra set of uniform or jumpsuit or PJs and a shirt or whatever you want to wear. Don't care what it is but bring extra stuff (and it goes with you on the ambulance). Be out of service till you are fully decontaminated and have put on Squad apparel.

Only let one person enter scene if possible. Only use other person for movement if possible. Have patient come out of house if possible. Cancel ALS if it's a patient that needs ALS but BLS crew can manage a short trip to the hospital without ALS interventions (I know it's risky, but our transport times are short enough for the majority of our ALS calls). If you absolutely need ALS, consider having them set up in the truck instead of having them walking through the facility and

getting exposure to the infection. Minimize how many providers get exposed to this thing. I'm not saying this as an ALS provider but rather as a healthcare employee/volunteer. They may not be members of our Squad, but they are just as important and serve a vital role in this field and we should attempt to minimize their contact if possible.

Lastly, don't forget to decontaminate everything. Make sure to do this after every potential COVID patient but also get in the habit of doing it on most of the calls even if they aren't COVID calls. Follow the pink sheet by the suction unit for a list of areas to decontaminate. Make sure to ventilate the ambulance after cleaning so that the bleach/chlorine doesn't stay in the ambulance. As part of your "drill" for the night, you will complete a full decontamination of the truck. Better to clean too much than not enough so please keep yourselves and your fellow members safe by practicing proper decontamination and good hygiene. You can use bleach (I will put it in the ambulances in the upcoming days) or purple top canister wipes from hospital or Cavicide spray for decontamination. Use the blue towels at the hospital or the car wash rags at the building for proper scrubbing if paper towels don't maintain their structural integrity as you scrub. Make sure to put the rags for wash after so another crew can use them.

I apologize for another lengthy email but unfortunately this will probably not be my last. As always, if you have any questions, please feel free to ask me and I'd be more than happy to answer them for you.

Stay safe,
Ankit Parikh
Chief
Plainsboro Rescue Squad