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Update 11 - COVID-19 – From Office of the Medical Director 26 MAR2020 1600

To All EMS Personnel in the EMS System for Metropolitan Oklahoma City & Tulsa

Key Content:

- **Work Uniform Hygiene Strategies**
- **Home Cleaning Strategies – CDC Guidance and Effective Products**
- **Talking About COVID-19 with Your Family**

This is a focused communication on family considerations. I am honestly trying to balance the asks for credible information, with needs for our EMS professionals and patients we serve, factoring the “personal bandwidth” that any busy professional (you) in a critically important work function (you) can absorb. This is a time that we are literally writing the “textbook” of best operations hour by hour.

Transparency is important in leadership. I had wanted to release Update 11 the afternoon of 24 Mar, but additional emergency situations arose and I’m also rapidly vetting additional clinical care information for you as well. While I plan on releasing that information tomorrow, I provide this information today, without further delay, with sincere hope it will help you stay healthy and safe, while also providing some information that can help you best manage the concerns folks that love you understandably have at this time and for the uncertain time ahead.

Doc, I want to take care of patients when they need me, but can we talk about me taking care of my family, too? What do I do to help them stay safe so I can focus on work when I’m at work and on them when I’m at home?

There’s a reason this is the issue addressed in this update. This week is when the “curve” gets a bit steeper in Oklahoma and when family concerns get more real. If you find yourself worried about the health and safety of your family, even noticing those concerns during patient care, you’ve confirmed you are human.

As we’ve shared before, no set of actions can guarantee your family will be *prevented* from even the smallest exposure to SARS-CoV-2, the novel coronavirus responsible for the COVID-19 illness. There are actions, however, that can reduce their risk. Some suggestions (subject to policies from your direct employer):

First and foremost, follow good PPE practices when at work. The best I have heard it summarized (as we shared in an earlier update) is by Michael Sayre, MD, Seattle Fire Department Medic One Medical Director, “If you wore the specified PPE (and took care of a COVID-19 patient), then you didn’t have an exposure.”

That said, still minimize your work uniform contact with your family members when coming home. There are multiple strategies for this that can be found on-line. They are all well-intended, though some more scientific in approach than others. No one can say with evidence-based certainty yet how many infectious viral particles could wind up on your uniform when not behind PPE. Even when in MEGG (N-95 mask, eye shield, gown, glove) there is still some exposure of the lower pants and duty shoes/boots. No one can say with evidence-based certainty yet how long SARS-CoV-2 could be infectious on uniform pants and duty shoes/boots. So, what can you do?

It's not unreasonable to remove your uniform in your garage or somewhere very near the entry door of your home, then placing your uniform in the laundry, separate from non-work clothing, washing uniform items with at least warm temperature water if not hotter, subject to fabric manufacturer washing recommendations. This might be the first time you've looked at the tags that contain fabric care instructions on your uniform items. Please do so.

Routinely use disinfectant wipes on duty shoes/boots (subject to footwear manufacturer advisements). Keep duty shoes/boots in the garage or away from where family members, especially children, might play with them.

A post-shift shower is likely good for infection control, physical wellness and even mental wellness. Shower away.

And then, enjoy time with your family.

Alternatively, again subject to employer policies, if you can wash uniform clothing at work, do so. Take home cleaned uniform items or leave them at work if the option exists.

Be vigilant about your health. If you suspect a fever, check your temperature as soon as possible. What symptoms do you have? With Spring, many of us will have a bit of a runny nose, or stuffy sinuses, even a waking up sore throat (from nasal drainage during sleep) or mild cough. Watch those symptoms carefully to see if they are escalating beyond what is "normal for you" at this time of year. If you are concerned about symptoms that could be COVID-19, notify your supervisor(s), seek advice from your primary care physician or healthcare provider, and don't come to work. Stay home, but pre-plan now so that if such happens, you already have a place of relative isolation away from family members while you recuperate. Avoiding/minimizing contact with family during such time will further decrease their chances of illness.

What about simple, but effective cleaning in the home?

Some links to credible information you may find useful when thinking about home cleaning:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/disinfecting-your-home.html>

<https://www.americanchemistry.com/Novel-Coronavirus-Fighting-Products-List.pdf>

Talk openly with adult members of your family and with children that are old enough to understand what is happening in the world regarding infectious disease. You know your family better than anyone else. If discussing COVID-19 and your role in treating others, some with COVID-19, will cause stress, then acknowledge it, reassure them you and we are doing everything we know possible to keep you safe at work so you can be safe at home, and offer to answer or find the answers to any questions they have. Then leave it at that.

Most family members will want to continue the conversation, but they may need to know you welcome them sharing their worries about you. Be careful about the endless news, more doom and gloom than usual these days, from the major news networks. Remember that journalism professionals are doing their job in reporting what they see. Also remember that "dog bites human" doesn't attract nearly as many viewers as "human bites dog." Be careful in accepting numbers and percentages about COVID-19 without reputable sources being given.

Whatever the approach family members (or you) have about discussing COVID-19 and its impact on you, this can be a stressful time for all of us. It's always best to be open about emotions in times like this rather than burying them for another day. Frankly, more not less difficult days are ahead. Here's a link to a useful resource about COVID-19 anxiety that anyone can use:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/managing-stress-anxiety.html>

Let your family know about these OMD updates and other updates you are receiving. You are welcome to share my comments with your family at any time. It's important they know you are staying informed about COVID-19 at work.

It's also important for you and your family to know we truly care about your safety and wellness. You honestly do perform heroic work every single shift. You have my promise to do everything we can with everything we have to see you safely through this.

Stay strong. Stay healthy. Stay safe.

Dr. Goodloe