

World Allergy Organization (WAO): Preparing your office for the COVID-19 Pandemic

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As COVID-19 continues to spread, it is important that we are ready to continue to care for patients, and to recognize patients who may potentially have, or have been exposed to, COVID-19.

1. Have a protocol in place to help protect both patients and staff.

- Prepare and practice a plan to manage patients with COVID-19 like symptoms or complaints.
- Know your community's plan for COVID-19 response. Know where to send your patients for testing and care.
- Consider visual alerts (signs, posters) at entrances and in strategic places providing instructions on hand hygiene, respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette.
- Designate staff who will be responsible for caring for suspected or known COVID-19 patients and ensure they are trained and have the proper personal protective equipment (PPD)
- Have an emergency staffing plan in case of absenteeism due to a COVID-19 outbreak.
- Designate a time to meet with your staff and educate them on COVID-19, its recognition and the actions they may need to take to prepare.
- Ensure staff are aware of sick leave policies and encouraged to stay home if they are ill with respiratory symptoms.
- Make contingency plans for increased absenteeism caused by employee illness in employee's family members that would require them to stay home.
- Consider extending hours, having employees cross cover, to include cross training employees or hiring temporary employees.

2. Ensure you have good communications with your staff in all situations.

- Ensure all staff phone numbers and email addresses for your staff are up to date.
- Ensure that your staff can reach you and that you can reach your staff in order to provide up to the minute information as needed.
- Have a plan to disseminate news and instructions quickly.

3. Ensure you have good communications with your patients.

- Be available for your patients. This may include a dedicated COVID-19 telephone number.
- If you have a web presence, update your home page often.

4. Protect your employees and patients

- To preserve healthcare system functioning, and to reduce the transmission of disease.
- Encourage sick employees to stay home.
- If possible, delay or reschedule elective and non-urgent visits, to include well check ups
- Explore alternatives to face-to-face triage and visits.
- Provide updates about changes to your policies regarding appointments. If your practice has a web presence, ensure these changes are highlighted.
- Consider telephone triage prior to patient visits. Have your patients call before coming to the office and have a list of questions regarding potential COVID 19 symptoms such as cough or fever.
- Have Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) available and ensure your staff knows when and how to use it.
- Ensure that supplies of soap, tissues alcohol-based hand sanitizer and waste receptacles are adequate.
- Provide patients with respiratory symptoms with masks
- Consider reaching out to patients who may be at a higher risk of COVID-19 related complications to ensure adherence to current medications and therapeutic regimens, confirm they have sufficient medication refills, and provide instructions to notify their provider by phone if they become ill.
- Plan for increased social distance for patients who must wait. This may mean removing chairs from your waiting room.

REFERENCES:

American Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/healthcare-facilities/index.html>

World Allergy Organization: <https://www.worldallergy.org>