COVID-19 Guidance for Home Health Care Agencies

Home health workers offer a valuable service to the health and well-being of our vulnerable community members. The Santa Cruz County Public Health Division is eager to work with home health agencies and workers to protect our community against COVID-19. Home Health Agencies and their staff have an important role in taking care of patients who have COVID-19 or Persons Under Investigation (PUI). A PUI is someone who might have the COVID-19 and needs to be placed by themselves (isolated). The need for home health care will likely increase along with the rise in people who contract COVID-19. A strong home health care workforce will help support patients recover from COVID-19.

The following guidelines are to help guard against infecting patients or becoming infected by patients so that everyone can remain healthy.

Home Healthcare Continues:

- Home health care services are essential services that will continue during the Shelter in Place order. The order can be found on www.santacruzhealth.org/coronavirus under Public Information. See sections 10 (b) & (f) for details about essential services.

Screen current and new patients:

- Before assigning a new patient to a home health care worker, Home Health Care Agency administrative staff must pre-screen patients and ask the following questions:
  1. Does the patient have any symptoms of COVID-19 (fever, cough, sore throat, or difficulty breathing)?
  2. In the last 14 days, has the patient or anyone in the household been exposed to
     - Someone who tested positive for COVID-19?
     - Someone waiting for test results for COVID-19?
     - Had contact with someone sick with respiratory illness?
  3. Someone who has traveled outside of the United States in the last 14 days.
Protect staff (Refer to the Center for Medicare & Medicaid Services Guidance):

- Make sure staff have access to Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). Refer to the Sequence for Putting on PPE.
- Make sure staff are putting on and taking off PPE correctly and safely when working with a patient who tested positive for COVID-19 or may have been exposed to COVID-19.

Returning to work- (after staff have been out sick because of COVID-19)

- Work with your supervisor and occupational health to determine when to return to work.
- Refer to CDC guidance or criteria for Return to Work for Healthcare Personnel with Confirmed or suspected COVID-19.

Reducing the amount of exposure for staff and patients- To the extent possible, please follow these guidelines:

  o Assign the same staff member to the same patients. This helps reduce the risk of exposing staff and patients to the corona virus.
  o Combine services for the same patient into 1 visit. For example, complete direct care, delivery of medications, and cooking into 1 visit.

Assess Workplace Exposure: See the Center for Disease Control (CDC) Risk Assessment Guidance with Potential Exposure to assist with assessment of risk, monitoring, and work restriction decisions for healthcare personnel with potential exposure to COVID-19.

For more detailed information about guidance for Home Health Care Agencies please visit the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) recently published guidance Home Health Agencies titled, “March 10 CMS Guidance for Infection Control and Prevention Concerning Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) in Home Health Agencies

Updated 4/3/20