



BARBARA FERRER, Ph.D., M.P.H., M.Ed.
Director

MUNTU DAVIS, M.D., M.P.H.
County Health Officer

313 North Figueroa Street, Room 808
Los Angeles, California 90012
TEL (213) 288-8769 • FAX (213) 975-9601

www.publichealth.lacounty.gov

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March 17, 2020

Dear Healthcare Executives and Chief Medical Officers:

As we have seen in other states and countries who have been affected earlier by COVID-19, a surge of critically ill patients has caused significant disruption to the normal functioning of local and national healthcare systems. The surge has caused severe shortages of hospital beds, ICU level beds, ventilators, medical staffing and supplies. In Los Angeles County, we are already starting to see some evidence of these same concerns, though we believe a larger surge is coming soon.

Los Angeles County is already seeing increasing numbers of positive COVID-19 results in the community suggesting a surge in hospitalized patients is coming soon. Though we have been recommending surge planning and implementation measures, I write to you today to urge the implementation of the following surge measures at this time:

1. Discontinuation of elective surgical procedures will protect the short supply of personal protective equipment and will free additional beds and staff to care for COVID-19 patients.
2. Close elective ambulatory clinics and consider repurposing staff and supplies to support and manage the surge plan.
3. Screen all staff for fever upon entry to facility to ensure that healthcare workers do not enter the facility symptomatic and transmit the virus to fellow staff or patients. Symptomatic staff should be sent home on home isolation.
4. Open non-traditional care areas to help manage a surge. After receipt of required regulatory clearance, facilities could identify sites such as perioperative areas and operating rooms to care for critically ill patients and ambulatory clinic space and waiting rooms for patients who do not require ICU level of care.
5. Develop triage plans for utilization of scarce resources such as ventilators.
6. Designate a full-time clinical staff member to be a liaison to Public Health. To ensure Public Health authorities are managing County resources effectively, we require daily updates about the number and severity of patients being cared for at each facility. While Infection Preventionists have filled this role traditionally, we perceive that these professionals are currently unable to interact in a timely manner with Public Health.

Thank you for cooperation in these difficult and unprecedented times.

Sincerely,

Muntu Davis, M.D., M.P.H.
County Health Officer