

***Date: November 14, 2022***

***To: Healthcare Providers and Hospitals in the Sierra-Sacramento Region***

***From: Health Officers of Alpine, Amador, El Dorado, Nevada, Placer, Plumas, Sacramento, Sierra, Sutter, Yolo, and Yuba Counties***

***Subject: Addressing current and anticipated pediatric patient surges at clinic and hospitals***

California, along with the rest of the United States, is experiencing a significant increase in the number of pediatric patients with respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) and other respiratory virus infections. Please contact your local Medical Health Operational Area Coordinator (MHOAC) regarding any surge your facility is experiencing, and any anticipated or current shortages of beds, staff or resources. However, because all counties are affected by this surge, we do not expect staffing relief to be available through mutual aid requests or through requests to the State at this time.

It is becoming clear that we will need to consider ways to expand our local pediatric care capacity to meet the increasing healthcare demand. We appreciate healthcare providers and hospitals who have already initiated the pediatric surge planning process, and encourage all healthcare providers, organizations, and hospitals to consider the following recommendations in your pediatric surge plans if not already implemented:

**A. Expand Outpatient Capacity to Off-Load Hospitals and Emergency Departments (EDs)**

Outpatient/ambulatory care settings should consider the following interventions:

- 1) Expand clinic and urgent care center hours, especially for pediatric outpatient visits.
- 2) Identify high-risk infants/young children in your patient population and administer prophylactic palivizumab to them per [AAP guidance](https://www.cdc.gov/Programs/OPA/Pages/CAHAN/Health-Advisory-Early-Respiratory-Syncytial-Virus-Activity-and-Use-of-Palivizumab.aspx) (<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/OPA/Pages/CAHAN/Health-Advisory-Early-Respiratory-Syncytial-Virus-Activity-and-Use-of-Palivizumab.aspx>).
- 3) Promote nurse advice lines for established patients to ensure timely evaluation and appropriate triaging of whether a patient should be seen via telehealth or in-person. CDC has a helpful algorithm to assist medical office telephone evaluation of patients with influenza that can be considered also for other respiratory viral illnesses: <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/antivirals/office-evaluation.htm>.

Some families coming to the emergency department may not need urgent medical care, but rather reassurance. Educating them to seek guidance from healthcare professionals through nurse advice lines will reduce the burden placed on EDs.

- 4) Encourage timely COVID-19 and flu vaccinations in all eligible patients. Offer timely antiviral treatment for patients at high-risk of progression to severe disease if they are diagnosed with symptomatic COVID-19 and/or flu.

## **B. Expand Capacity of Community Hospitals**

Many hospitals in the region have no pediatric beds/units and traditionally rely on transfers to pediatric specialty hospitals. Such transfers may not be available or will be significantly delayed during this surge. We recommend that community hospitals consider the following:

- 1) Discuss with your referral children's specialty hospitals which pediatric patients could remain at community hospitals and which should be prioritized for transfer to pediatric specialty hospitals, based on factors such as age and acuity of illness.
- 2) Consider which space, staffing, and/or documentation program flexes from CDPH Licensing and Certification your community hospital might need and start the process now to acquire them.
- 3) Consider training and credentialing pediatric outpatient providers to provide inpatient care for older pediatric patients.
- 4) Review the US Department of Health and Human Services' compendium of pediatric surge resources: <https://asprtracie.hhs.gov/pediatric-surge>.

The California Department of Public Health (CDPH) also issued out an All-Facilities Letter (AFL) regarding [\*Guidance for Response to Surge in Respiratory Viruses among Pediatric Patients\*](#), that we highly encourage all healthcare providers and hospitals to review.

As your healthcare teams work hard to prepare for and respond to the surge, our public health teams are working in parallel to prevent respiratory virus infections. Each of our county health departments is committed to communicating clearly with the public about what actions they can take to prevent respiratory infections in the first place. Throughout this surge, we will continue to:

- 1) Issue messaging regarding timely COVID-19 and flu vaccinations.
- 2) Promote mitigation practices for RSV and other respiratory infections for which vaccines are not available by emphasizing the need to stay at home when sick, wash hands often, practice proper cough etiquette, and wear masks indoors.
- 3) Recommend that child care settings and schools eliminate any requirements for children to have tested negative for RSV prior to returning to child care or school after a symptomatic illness, as long as the child's symptoms have improved. This should reduce unnecessary healthcare visits for clearance testing.

- 4) Recommend the use of Medi-Cal health plans' nurse advice lines for Medi-Cal beneficiaries without a medical home.

Thank you for all that you do to care for residents of our counties. We look forward to continuing to partner with you to serve residents within the Sierra-Sacramento Region.

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