

## **NEW MEXICO DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH COVID-19 HOTLINE: 1-855-600-3453**

The Cochiti Fire Department has developed guidelines for response to medical emergencies during the COVID-19 pandemic. We are considering an anticipated increase in call volume, the possibility of the quarantine of crew members and prolonged hospital drop-off times. We all play a role in the response to this virus and we would like to share some of the details of our plan so you are informed as well. We hope to provide you some guidance should you develop concerns that you may have COVID-19.

As small team of rural volunteers, it is absolutely imperative that we make sure that the limited resources that we have are best utilized to maximize availability for patients in need of our services. We anticipate an increase in our call volume directly related to COVID-19 symptoms. This call volume will be in addition to the emergencies we currently respond to such as strokes, car accidents and cardiac emergencies in the area. While we are not able to increase the number of EMTs and responders we have on the team to help accommodate the increased call volume, we can take steps to maximize efficiency.

The New Mexico COVID-19 hotline can help triage patients to determine if, when where and how patients should seek care. If you have any of these symptoms: **cough, fever, shortness of breath**, and they **have not** become life threatening and suspect you might at COVID-19 the first thing you should do is call the **New Mexico Department of Health COVID-19 Hotline** at the above number

**If you experience any of the following conditions related to the symptoms described above call 911:**

- Difficulty speaking because you cannot catch your breath
- Chest pain not related to soreness from coughing
- Not acting normally or altered mental status
- Blue lips or finger nail beds

Many of the patients experiencing COVID-19 like symptoms can be appropriately triaged by the state COVID-19 Hotline and seek alternative means of transport when appropriate. The vast majority of patients diagnosed with COVID-19 are managed at home under the guidance of the professionals staffing the State COVID-19 Hotline. The hotline can help screen patients to determine when the best time to take the risk of exposure in the hospital outweighs the risks of not being assessed and treated.

Our volunteers have been thoroughly trained on the new protocols around COVID-19 and acknowledge this is what we all signed up for.

### **The CFD Volunteers that live in district:**

- 1 Paramedic
- 5 Advanced EMTs
- 5 EMTs
- 1 First Responder
- 10 Support (drivers, firefighters)

If a volunteer is exposed to COVID-19 there is the potential they would have to be placed in quarantine. This has a negative impact in the following ways:

- reduces the number of EMTs available to respond to emergencies
- the EMT would spend time away from their family
- the EMT would not be allowed to return to their regular, paid job

Additionally, we are anticipating that the amount of time that we spend at the hospital to transfer patient care to the

hospital will be significantly prolonged. Area hospitals have implemented a process to sort patients with COVID-19 like symptoms into predesignated regions of the hospital to be evaluated and treated.

We have two ambulances in the Cochiti Fire District but the availability of the second ambulance is subject to volunteer availability at any given time and other calls for service that might be going on.

Santo Domingo does have an ambulance that will on occasion assist us with emergencies when we are out of the area if they are not busy. However, our next closest resource responds from the Placitas Fire Station/Town of Bernalillo and can take 30 minutes or more to arrive on a scene in the Cochiti Area.

### **So what can the community do to help us minimize these complications?**

The state hotline listed above is your first-line resource and should be used when safe and appropriate to do so. The hotline can also help you determine if your situation requires ambulance transport or not. This will also help us minimize extended amounts of time spent out of district and not available. Keep in mind that patients who may have COVID-19 but do not have life threatening symptoms may be appropriately transported via other means most of the time. Again, the hotline is staffed by professionals that can help make this decision.

### **So when should you bypass the hotline and call 911 for an ambulance immediately?**

**If you experience any of the following conditions related to the symptoms described above call 911:**

- Difficulty speaking because you cannot catch your breath
- Chest pain not related to soreness from coughing
- Not behaving normally or altered mental status
- Blue lips or finger nail beds

Our dispatch crews have been instructed to begin their screening process when you place a 911 call. Depending on the symptoms that you report, crews have been instructed to have one EMT evaluate the patient and determine needed equipment and resources and communicate those needs to crew members standing by outside at the ambulance. This is an effort to minimize exposure to crews while continuing to evaluate and treat patients and calling only for necessary equipment into the home or scene. EMT's will be wearing a face mask, eye protection, face protection, gowns and gloves. As for family members wanting to accompany in the ambulance, we will now only be allowing this in situations involving minors or when a patient has a legal guardian that needs to be present with the patient at all times. Family members are encouraged to follow the ambulance to the hospital, but should wait in their vehicle at the hospital until they are contacted by phone and provided with instructions. Visitors will not be allowed into the isolation areas of the hospital.

The intent of this communication is not to discourage patients from seeking care either at the hospital or via ambulance, but to inform the community of the reality of rural emergency medical care in a community serviced by a volunteer department. We are extremely fortunate to have the team that we do but we do have limitations and it would be unethical to withhold those realities from the community. Together we can limit the impacts of COVID-19 and deploy resources to maximize efficiency.

### **KEY TAKEAWAYS**

**-If you think you might have COVID-19, calling the hotline is the better option to determine what steps to take.**

**-Having COVID-19 in and of itself does not mean that you are having a medical emergency. Some symptoms of severe cases may be an emergency but this is rare.**

**-Most cases of COVID-19 are managed at home and do not require hospitalization.**

**-Using EMS for transport to the Hospital should be reserved for cases in which patients have a life threatening emergency.**

**-Resources are limited and should be optimized.**

**-If you are experiencing a life threatening emergency, you should call 911 immediately.**

Please see the following state resources:

New Mexico Department of Health COVID-19 Hotline: **1-855-600-3453**

New Mexico Department of Health COVID-19 Webpage: <http://cv.nmhealth.org/public/>

Links to CDC and WHO COVID-19 resources can also be found on the state's webpage.