

Resource Guide

# Communicating with Patients Amid Covid-19

---

Example communications highlighting safety protocols and answers to FAQs

Article by Market Innovation Center

Published – May 2020 • 10 min read



---

# Table of contents

Details to consider when crafting communications. . . . . pg. 3

Communication examples from health care providers. . . . . pg. 5

Communication examples from other industries. . . . . pg. 6

Example emails from health care providers . . . . . pg. 7

Related resources. . . . . pg. 13

CRAFTING A MESSAGE

# Details to consider when crafting communications

Consumers are eager for credible information about Covid-19, when and how to seek various types of health care services, and what to expect if they do require in person care. Yet many health systems are providing less frequent information or less detailed safety information than companies and service providers in other industries.

To ensure your communications address consumers' most pressing needs, assess whether you have provided guidance on the following:

## 1. Status of Covid-19 infections and facility closures

- Is your site open? Has it been open? For what types of visits?
- If the site has been closed, when do you plan to re-open? What guidance are you following to make these decisions?
- What are the local Covid-19 infection, testing, and hospital bed utilization rates?

## 2. Recommendations on Covid-19 and antibody testing

- Who should seek testing for Covid-19 infection?
- Where can patients receive testing and is a physician referral required?
- What does the testing process involve and how long will it take to process the results?
- Do you recommend antibody testing? For which patients and under what circumstances?
- What should patients do after receiving an antibody test result (e.g., discuss with their primary care provider)?

## 2. New safety precautions and what patients can expect when coming in for a visit

- How are you screening patients and staff for Covid-19?
- What are you cleaning? How often? What does the cleaning process look like?
- How should patients check in for their appointments (e.g., should they call when outside the building and then wait there until notified to come in?)
- Are patients and visitors required to use masks? Will you provide one if a patient does not have one?
- Have you changed the furniture layout of your offices or waiting rooms to promote physical distancing?

---

**CRAFTING A MESSAGE**

- Are you offering hand sanitizer and disinfectant wipes? Are you requiring patients to use these upon entry?
- How are you promoting social distancing and minimizing exposure?
- How are you physically separating patients with Covid-19 from those without?
- What PPE will staff be wearing?
- What is your visitor policy? If a patient cannot have someone accompany them to a visit, can that person dial in to the visit?
- How are you handling payment and appointment follow-up?
- Are you doing contact tracing?

**3. Guidance on the availability and use of telehealth**

- Is telehealth available?
- Are all providers in the practice available via telehealth?
- How long will patients typically have to wait for an appointment?
- What types of services can be handled effectively via telehealth?
- How can patients schedule an appointment?
- How long is an appointment and do patients need to do anything to prepare?
- Once an appointment is scheduled, what will happen next (e.g., will the patient receive an email with a link to log in somewhere? Will they receive a phone call?)
- How are telehealth visits billed?

**4. Information on whom to contact with questions or concerns**

- What are the various channels for getting in touch?
- If patients portals are an option, how can patients sign up for an account?
- How long will it take to get a response?

COMMUNICATION EXAMPLES FROM HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS

Intent	Organization	Brief Description	Format
<b>Share Covid-19 information</b>	<a href="#">Cleveland Clinic</a>	Covid-19-themed Instagram series	Social Media
	<a href="#">Carilion Clinic, Salem VA Medical Center, LewisGale Regional Health System</a>	Panel discussion with officials from several area health systems	TV broadcast
	<a href="#">Kona Community Hospital</a>	Brief “what you need to know” resource	Infographic
	<a href="#">Cullman Regional Medical Center</a>	Covid-19 resource hub	Website
	<a href="#">ChenMed</a>	Covid-19 resource hub	Website
	<a href="#">Centura Health</a>	Covid-19 resource hub	Website
	<a href="#">University of South Alabama Health</a>	Covid-19 resource hub	Website
	<a href="#">York Hospital</a>	Answers to FAQs	Website
<b>Highlight quality and safety protocols</b>	<a href="#">Overlake Medical Center</a>	Q&A with clinical team about new quality and safety protocols	Video
	<a href="#">Memorial Health</a>	Overview of safety procedures	TV broadcast
	<a href="#">Cottage Health</a>	Overview of safety procedures	Webpage
	<a href="#">Sentara Healthcare</a>	Weekly Facebook broadcast to provide community updates	Social Media
<b>Advise against avoiding care</b>	<a href="#">BetterTogether.Health</a>	Consortium of LA hospitals warn the community against the dangers of avoiding care	Webpage
	<a href="#">Northern Westchester Hospital</a>	Educational video on the importance of seeking care for non-Covid-19 needs	Video
<b>Market new services</b>	<a href="#">Hillsdale Hospital</a>	Overview of new telehealth services	Video
	<a href="#">Piedmont Fayette Hospital</a>	Article highlighting new email inbox for families and friends to send messages and well wishes to loved ones	News Article
<b>Celebrate wins</b>	<a href="#">Inspira Health Network</a>	CEO recognizes team’s efforts and celebrates good news	Video

COMMUNICATION EXAMPLES FROM OTHER INDUSTRIES

Intent	Organization	Brief Description	Format
<b>Outline what customers can expect</b>	<a href="#">Target</a>	Outlines Covid-19 response and what to expect when shopping in-person	Website
	<a href="#">Walmart</a>	Details safety standards, store information, community outreach efforts, and Covid-19 FAQs	Website
	<a href="#">Trader Joe's</a>	Updates customers on social distancing measures across all stores	Website
	<a href="#">FedEx</a>	Lays out new safety standards and shipping guidelines	Website
	<a href="#">Lyft</a>	Explains new ridesharing protocol and provides Covid-19 information	Website
<b>Highlight quality and safety protocols to protect customers and employees</b>	<a href="#">Southwest Airlines</a>	Educates customers on enhanced cleaning protocols and physical distancing measures	Video, website
	<a href="#">SoulCycle</a>	Shares new safety protocols and phased plan for studio re-openings	Website
	<a href="#">Amtrak</a>	Highlights new safety protocols	Video
	<a href="#">Papa John's</a>	Details new no-contact order and delivery method	Video

EXAMPLE EMAILS FROM HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS

# Mid-Atlantic Skin Surgery Institute Waldorf, MD

**Why we like it:**

- Outlines in detail what patients can expect at their visit, including everything from how to check in, move through the building and provide payment.
- Conveys a sense of mutual accountability and commitment to the situation.
- Reinforces the availability of telehealth and provides examples of what it can be used for.
- Provides links to associated social media platforms.

To our patients,

We hope this message finds you and your family healthy. We are happy to announce that our practice is staying open for patient care while continuing to take the following precautions to maintain the health and safety of our patients and staff:

1. When making an appointment with our practice our staff will inquire if you have experienced the COVID 19 virus or come in contact with anyone that has. We are asking that patients screen themselves and remain symptom free and fever free for at least 72 hours prior to their appointment.
2. Patients should come to their visit wearing a face covering (cloth mask, medical mask, or bandana) that covers their mouth and nose during their entire visit.
3. When coming to your appointment, patients must come alone unless they are under the age of 18 or for medical diagnosis that need to be escorted by a caregiver/family member. Children under the age of 18 are not permitted unless they are being seen by a provider. Patients are advised to use the bathroom prior to leaving home.
4. We are encouraging our patients to take the stairs when visiting our Waldorf location.
5. Patients can expect to have their temperature taken and hands sprayed with alcohol when entering our practice.
6. To ensure social distancing patients may be asked to check in and return to their vehicle until the provider is ready to see them. Our front desk staff will call and make the patient aware that it is okay to enter the waiting room.
7. All patient information will be gathered at the time of making the appointment to help us remain as touchless as possible. Consents will be taken verbally. Copies of consents will be available upon request. Payments for services is encouraged to be made by credit/debit. No cash or checks will be accepted at this time.

While our patients do their part, we will continue to do ours by wearing masks, cleaning and disinfecting each of our rooms between each patient visit, and wiping down all surface areas.

**One of the safest ways to stay home and safe is by taking advantage of our TELEHEALTH option! When calling to make an appointment ask if Telehealth is the right option for YOU! Our virtual telehealth visits allow the providers to help our patients with prescription refills, acne, rashes, cosmetic consultations, MOHS vs SRT consultations, and most of your follow up type appointments.**

**Stay Safe!**

---

Mid-Atlantic Skin | [Website](#) | (301) 396-3401



EXAMPLE EMAILS FROM HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS

# Oneal Russell, DDS

## Annapolis, MD

### Why we like it:

- Conveys commitment to patient safety and provides insight into the agency recommendations they are following.
- Outlines in detail what patients can expect at their visit, including everything from Covid-19 pre-screening, disinfectant protocols once on-site, and check-in and waiting processes.
- References rescheduled appointments and how those will be handled.
- Reinforces the content by providing the same safety protocols in a pop-up message on their [website](#).

5/4/20

We hope this letter finds you and your family in good health. Our community has been through a lot over the last few months, and all of us are looking forward to resuming our normal habits and routines. While many things have changed, one thing has remained the same: our commitment to your safety.

Infection control has always been a top priority for our practice and you may have seen this during your visits to our office. Our infection control processes are made so that when you receive care, it's both safe and comfortable. We want to tell you about the infection control procedures we follow in our practice to keep patients and staff safe.

Our office follows infection control recommendations made by the American Dental Association (ADA), the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). We follow the activities of these agencies so that we are up-to-date on any new rulings or guidance that may be issued. We do this to make sure that our infection control procedures are current and adhere to each agencies' recommendations.

You may see some changes when it is time for your next appointment. We made these changes to help protect our patients and staff. For example:

- Our office will communicate with you beforehand to ask some screening questions. You'll be asked those same questions again when you are in the office.
- Temperatures will be taken.
- We have hand sanitizer that we will ask you to use when you enter the office. You will also find some in the reception area and other places in the office for you to use as needed.
- Anti-microbial rinses will proceed your dental appointment,
- You may see that our waiting room will no longer offer magazines, children's toys and so forth, since those items are difficult to clean and disinfect.
- Appointments will be managed to allow for social distancing between patients. That might mean that you're offered fewer options for scheduling your appointment.
- We will do our best to allow greater time between patients to reduce waiting times for you, as well as to reduce the number of patients in the reception area at any one time. This will include asking you to call when you arrive in the parking lot. When the office is cleared of the previous patients we will call you up for your appointment.

We look forward to seeing you again and are happy to answer any questions you may have about the steps we take to keep you, and every patient, safe in our practice. When given clearance from the Governor to resume operations we will be in contact with those that had to be rescheduled during the shutdown.

Thank you for being our patient. We value your trust and loyalty and look forward to welcoming back our patients, neighbors and friends.

Sincerely,

Dr. Russell and Staff

EXAMPLE EMAILS FROM HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS

# Lurie Children’s Primary Care Chicago, IL

**Why we like it:**

- Email title is simple: “We’re here for you.”
- Includes an overview of the email contents at the top.
- Uses bolded section headers to convey the most important information, with details listed as bullet points for readability.
- Provides external links for more information.
- Includes photos of the practice and staff to personalize the message and show what some of the safety practices will look like.
- Addresses FAQs in a simple format.
- Details specific new safety processes.



**Dear Families,**

We are open to serve you and your children, and we have enhanced the safety of our environment!

- **We Maintain a Safe Environment in Our Offices**
- **Our Services are Essential**
- **We Promote MyChart Use**
- **Appointments and Questions**
- **Telemedicine FAQs**

**We Maintain a Safe Environment in Our Offices**

We have put the following practices and protocols in place:

- We promote social distancing.
- We require universal masking for all patients and staff. Additional PPE such as gowns and gloves will be used as necessary.
- We screen all patients for COVID-19 prior to their appointment.
- We have added time between appointments to limit the number of patients in the office at a time.
- We ask parents to limit the number of people coming to our office to one healthy adult and one patient.
- We thoroughly clean the surfaces of every room between visits in order to prevent the spread of infections.
- We have removed chairs from patient and staff areas to help with distancing.
- We require staff to answer daily screening questions and take their temperature prior to each shift.

**Our Services are Essential**

- As pediatricians, we feel strongly that your child’s annual physical exam is an important tool to monitor your child’s ongoing growth and development.
- We are available to perform your child’s routine check-ups in a safe environment.
- Children still need immunizations, and parents still need to know that their children are growing the way they should.
- We don’t want our patients going without the health care they need, whether they are well, sick, or have chronic conditions.
- We now have Telemedicine appointments available for certain sick visit types and behavioral health visits (see below for Telemedicine FAQ).

EXAMPLE EMAILS FROM HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS

# Lurie Children's Primary Care (continued)

## We Promote MyChart Use

Here are a few of the things MyChart allows you to do from your home or cell:

- Expedite the check-in and check-out processes
- Schedule your next visit
- View after-visit summaries
- Access school forms
- Review medications, immunizations, and other health records
- Message a doctor or nurse practitioner

You can sign up for [MyChart](#) online or call 312.227.2806. Download the mobile app for [Apple](#) and [Android](#).

## Appointments and Questions

If you have a scheduled appointment, please plan on keeping it if you are able, or call the office if you wish to cancel.

If you have questions about COVID-19, we encourage you to visit the Lurie Children's COVID-19 information page which is updated regularly by the hospital. [Lurie Children's COVID-19 FAQ](#)

If you have any other questions, please do not hesitate to call us at 312.227.2800.

Thank you,

**Lurie Children's Primary Care - Town & Country Pediatrics**



## Telemedicine FAQs

### How do I schedule a Telemedicine visit?

Please call our office. In the future, we hope that scheduling will be available via MyChart.

### What types of visits are offered via Telemedicine?

At this time we are offering Telemedicine as an option for certain types of behavioral health and sick visits. Please call the office to discuss your child's symptoms so that we can determine whether a Telemedicine or in-person visit is needed.

Telemedicine is not available for check-ups and well visits.

### Is Telemedicine secure and private?

Yes, it is an encrypted, HIPAA-compliant, video-conferencing platform.

### Is this covered by my insurance?

Since the advent of COVID-19, insurance plans have been expanding their Telemedicine coverage. Contact your insurance company for specific information about your plan's coverage.

### Where can I get more information on COVID-19?

For the latest information and resources, please visit the [Lurie Children's COVID-19 page](#).

Lurie Children's Primary Care -  
Town & Country Pediatrics  
Halsted 312.227.2800  
Glenview 312.227.2850  
Lincoln 312.227.2880  
[www.luriechildrens.org/top](http://www.luriechildrens.org/top)



## We Have Telemedicine!

We now offer Telemedicine for certain sick and behavioral health visits!

Call us at 312.227.2800 to discuss your child's symptoms and determine whether a Telemedicine or in-person visit is needed.

EXAMPLE EMAILS FROM HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS

# One Medical Washington, DC

**Why we like it:**

- Uses a simple subject line.
- Addresses a single topic per outreach (see pg. 12 for messages on other topics)
- Begins with a tone of empathy, but also shares a point of view.
- Provides examples to make it easier to visualize how you might use the service.
- Includes visible links and buttons to schedule appointments or access more information.
- Uses simple, bolded section headers and modern graphics to communicate key points.

📍 one medical

## Care for your body and mind



It's Mental Health Month and so many people are dealing with difficult emotions right now. We want you to know that you're not alone. We're here not just for your physical well-being, but your emotional well-being too — today and every day.

We see mental health as a vital part of primary care, and all of our providers regularly help people with mental health conditions — from sleep issues to anxiety to depression. Book a visit (in person or over video) and we'll work with you on a plan to help you find some much-needed peace of mind.

[Book a visit](#)

---

**Some things we can help with:**

- Stress
- Anxiety
- Sleep issues
- Depression
- Grief
- Loneliness
- Mood disorders
- Racing thoughts
- And more

---

**Check out our mental health resources**

Not ready to talk to a provider? We have mental health content in our [coronavirus help center](#) to help you cope with the unique challenges of this time, including [how to prioritize your mental health while self-isolating](#) and [how to cope with job loss during COVID-19](#).

 If you need anything at all, just reach out to us. We're always here for you.

EXAMPLE EMAILS

# One Medical (continued)

## Come get the care you need

People have had to put off so many things due to COVID-19. But looking after your health shouldn't be one of them. We're open and ready to treat you safely in our offices — whether you're sick, have a chronic condition to follow up on, need in-office services like getting vaccines or an IUD, or something else.

[Book a visit](#)

### What we're doing to protect your health



**Dedicated offices for those who may have COVID-19**  
Certain offices are designated only for people suspected of having COVID-19 to avoid potentially spreading the virus. And all COVID-19 testing is done either off-site or in a dedicated office.



**Office updates**  
We've rearranged our lobbies and workstations to make sure everyone can stay 6 feet apart, and we've installed HEPA filters to purify the air in all lobbies, exam rooms, and labs. We've also added hand sanitizer stations to all common spaces.



**Additional cleaning procedures**  
In addition to our normal rigorous cleaning protocols, we deeply clean and sanitize every room with disinfectants that are EPA-approved for the coronavirus after each patient with potential COVID-19 symptoms or exposure. We're also regularly sanitizing restrooms and shared surfaces.



**New protocols for patients**  
Anyone who arrives without a mask will be given one to wear. And we're asking people to come to appointments as close to their appointment time as possible to reduce time spent in the lobby — and without guests unless necessary.



**Regular screening and testing of staff**  
Our team members are screened for symptoms, including fevers, every day before work and will be tested regularly for COVID-19. Everyone wears appropriate personal protective equipment and follows strict hand-sanitizing guidelines.

### See a provider from home with Remote Visits

Not everything requires an office visit. You can book a Remote Visit to talk to a provider over video for a wide range of concerns — from stress to diet and exercise to sleep issues.

one medical

## Meet the new kind of house call

While so much has changed over the past month, the importance of getting care when you need it hasn't. That's where our new Remote Visits come in. These scheduled appointments are conducted and billed just like a regular office visit — but done over video from the safety of home.



[Book a Remote Visit](#)

### Here's what to expect with Remote Visits



#### Appointments with your own provider

You can book Remote Visits with the provider of your choice — so you can get care from the person you feel most comfortable with during these turbulent times.



#### No waiting, no rushing

Remote Visits start at a set time, so you don't have to wait to talk to the next available person. You can discuss any of your health concerns or goals — from prevention to mental health to chronic conditions.



#### The care you need, now

There are so many things you have to put off right now, but looking after your health shouldn't be one of them. Whether you've got lingering shoulder pain, insomnia, or a kid with a rash, Remote Visits let you see a provider without leaving home.

You can book Remote Visits in the Office Visits section of the [app](#) or website. They're billed through insurance like regular office visits, so standard copays and deductibles apply. And if you need to be seen in person, we'll still have in-office appointments available.

Worried about COVID-19? Get the [latest information](#) on how to protect your health and get care.

# Related resources

Resource	Sample Contents and Who Should Use
<a href="#"><u>CDC – Communicating During an Outbreak or Public Health Investigation</u></a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elements of effective communication during an outbreak</li> <li>• Excerpts of health system communications</li> <li>• Good for those crafting patient-facing communications or communication with the media</li> </ul>
<a href="#"><u>VitalTalk – COVID-Ready Communication Playbook</u></a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scripting for different situations related to Covid-19</li> <li>• Good for frontline managers and staff fielding direct patient questions</li> </ul>
<a href="#"><u>FEMA – Communicating in an Emergency</u></a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Factors affecting communication strategies (p. 13-14)</li> <li>• Pros and cons associated with specific communication platforms (p. 26)</li> </ul>
<a href="#"><u>WHO – Psychological First Aid: A Guide for Field Workers</u></a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Framework for supporting those suffering serious crisis events</li> <li>• Good for those in a position to help others who have experienced an extremely distressing event</li> </ul>
<a href="#"><u>Advisory Board – Patients are Frightened to Seek Necessary Care Amid Covid-19. Here’s How to Overcome their Fears</u></a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Six tactics your organization could deploy to create a safe environment for patients</li> <li>• Health system and physician practice leadership and communications teams</li> </ul>

## Market Innovation Center

### Project Director

Rebecca Tyrrell, MS  
tyrrellr@advisory.com

### Research Team

Sharareh Afshani  
Avery Morrison

### Program Leadership

Alicia Daugherty

---

#### LEGAL CAVEAT

Advisory Board has made efforts to verify the accuracy of the information it provides to members. This report relies on data obtained from many sources, however, and Advisory Board cannot guarantee the accuracy of the information provided or any analysis based thereon. In addition, Advisory Board is not in the business of giving legal, medical, accounting, or other professional advice, and its reports should not be construed as professional advice. In particular, members should not rely on any legal commentary in this report as a basis for action, or assume that any tactics described herein would be permitted by applicable law or appropriate for a given member's situation. Members are advised to consult with appropriate professionals concerning legal, medical, tax, or accounting issues, before implementing any of these tactics. Neither Advisory Board nor its officers, directors, trustees, employees, and agents shall be liable for any claims, liabilities, or expenses relating to (a) any errors or omissions in this report, whether caused by Advisory Board or any of its employees or agents, or sources or other third parties, (b) any recommendation or graded ranking by Advisory Board, or (c) failure of member and its employees and agents to abide by the terms set forth herein.

Advisory Board and the "A" logo are registered trademarks of The Advisory Board Company in the United States and other countries. Members are not permitted to use these trademarks, or any other trademark, product name, service name, trade name, and logo of Advisory Board without prior written consent of Advisory Board. All other trademarks, product names, service names, trade names, and logos used within these pages are the property of their respective holders. Use of other company trademarks, product names, service names, trade names, and logos or images of the same does not necessarily constitute (a) an endorsement by such company of Advisory Board and its products and services, or (b) an endorsement of the company or its products or services by Advisory Board. Advisory Board is not affiliated with any such company.

#### IMPORTANT: Please read the following.

Advisory Board has prepared this report for the exclusive use of its members. Each member acknowledges and agrees that this report and the information contained herein (collectively, the "Report") are confidential and proprietary to Advisory Board. By accepting delivery of this Report, each member agrees to abide by the terms as stated herein, including the following:

1. Advisory Board owns all right, title, and interest in and to this Report. Except as stated herein, no right, license, permission, or interest of any kind in this Report is intended to be given, transferred to, or acquired by a member. Each member is authorized to use this Report only to the extent expressly authorized herein.
2. Each member shall not sell, license, republish, or post online or otherwise this Report, in part or in whole. Each member shall not disseminate or permit the use of, and shall take reasonable precautions to prevent such dissemination or use of, this Report by (a) any of its employees and agents (except as stated below), or (b) any third party.
3. Each member may make this Report available solely to those of its employees and agents who (a) are registered for the workshop or membership program of which this Report is a part, (b) require access to this Report in order to learn from the information described herein, and (c) agree not to disclose this Report to other employees or agents or any third party. Each member shall use, and shall ensure that its employees and agents use, this Report for its internal use only. Each member may make a limited number of copies, solely as adequate for use by its employees and agents in accordance with the terms herein.
4. Each member shall not remove from this Report any confidential markings, copyright notices, and/or other similar indicia herein.
5. Each member is responsible for any breach of its obligations as stated herein by any of its employees or agents.
6. If a member is unwilling to abide by any of the foregoing obligations, then such member shall promptly return this Report and all copies thereof to Advisory Board.



---

655 New York Avenue NW, Washington DC 20001  
202-266-5600 | [advisory.com](https://www.advisory.com)