

INTERNATIONAL TRAUMA LIFE SUPPORT

CARE OF THE TRAUMA PATIENT IN THE AGE OF COVID-19

The guidelines and references contained in this document are current as of the date of publication and in no way replace physician medical oversight.

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COVID-19 has changed the way medicine is practiced across the world, just as it has changed how we live, work and interact with our fellow man. It has been just over 100 years since the world faced a health crisis of this magnitude, the 1918-1920 Influenza Pandemic (also called the Spanish Flu), which is estimated to have caused approximately 50 million deaths (a case fatality rate of about 10%)¹. The current outbreak, while it appears to be more deadly than the seasonal influenza we deal with yearly, does not appear to be as lethal as the 1918 Flu.

That being said, there is a large amount of fear and concern about this new infection and how it will affect EMS providers as we try to go about our jobs and care for our patients. Much of the uncertainty is due to the rapidly evolving nature of our knowledge of this new infection and the deluge of information we face as providers, from many sources. Often the information is conflicting and this further exacerbates the anxiety among providers. Knowledge is your best tool to protect yourself, your colleagues, and your family and friends. Accept that information will change often. Follow the guidelines for use of personal protective gear (PPE) and **wash your hands!**

ITLS is an organization devoted to training emergency providers how to care for the victims of traumatic injury. We do not presume to tell you how to manage COVID-19 patients. **You should follow the guidelines put forth by your medical director, agency, public health authority or national health authority.** For those who do not have access to such sources of information, we have provided at the end of this document links to the World Health Organization (WHO) and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (US CDC) portals on COVID-19.

There are some basic steps we can and must take to protect ourselves and those around us. Remember that care of the multiple trauma patient involves a high risk of exposure to blood and other potentially infectious materials (OPIM) and therefore, we always take precautions against such exposures. It appears that (as of date of publication of this document) COVID-19 is spread by droplet nuclei, primarily from the respiratory tract. Therefore, EMS providers performing respiratory support and invasive airway procedures should don mask, goggles or face shield, gown and gloves before performing such procedures. Consult your agency for proper procedure to don and doff this type of PPE. While removing the PPE after use, responders are at risk for contaminating themselves. Be sure to clean your equipment and vehicles following the recommendations of your organization or health authority.



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Handwashing is by far the best way to prevent spread of any infectious disease, including COVID-19. If unable to wash with soap and water, one can use alcohol-based hand sanitizer (at least 60% alcohol) to clean hands. Proper steps to wash hands or use sanitizers are available from multiple sources, and emergency care providers should follow the recommendations of their agency².

COVID-19 does **NOT CHANGE THE PRIORITIES OR STEPS OF MANAGING THE TRAUMA PATIENT!** The ITLS Primary Survey is the same. Identify immediate threats to life and correct them: **C-ABC!** Invasive airway procedures and those that generate aerosols pose particular hazards for responders. Appropriate PPE lessens the risk. Follow guidelines from local or national resources³. Advise the receiving medical facility if the patient meets the criteria for possible COVID-19 and record the identities of all responders who were in contact with the patient. If patients require intubation, the use of a HEPA filter on the bag mask or ventilator circuit decreases the risk of droplet spread. Follow manufacturer's guidance about use of these filters.

Caring for the victims of trauma with the high likelihood of exposure to blood or other body fluids is something we understand and deal with by using PPE. In this new world of COVID-19, we have to be sure we take all the appropriate steps to protect ourselves ... which is something we do every day.

To reiterate some key points:

- Wear the appropriate PPE based on your agency guidance.
- Wash your hands
- Practice social distancing
- Keep hands away from your face
- Take care of yourself and your colleagues: Our job is stressful and COVID-19 has added to the stress
- Clean your equipment and vehicle
- Follow your trauma care protocols (based on ITLS guidelines)

Be safe and be well. Thank you for what you do for your patients and communities.

COVID-19 RESOURCES

1. US CDC Coronavirus Website: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>
2. World Health Organization Coronavirus Website: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>



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3. New York State EMS Guidance for COVID-19:
<https://www.health.ny.gov/professionals/ems/pdf/20-02.pdf>
4. NHS (UK) Coronavirus COVID-19 Website:
<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>
5. Worldometer: COVID-19 Coronavirus Pandemic:
<https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/>

REFERENCES

1. <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/pandemic-resources/1918-commemoration/1918-pandemic-history.htm>, accessed March 20, 2020.
2. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/infection-control/hcp-hand-hygiene-faq.html>, accessed March 20, 2020.
3. US CDC Guidance for EMS providers. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/guidance-for-ems.html>, accessed March 20, 2020.



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