

4 Patient-Facing COVID-19 Resources to Curb Unnecessary Hospital Visits

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What Does It Mean?

To reduce the burden and transmission of COVID-19 within their facilities, U.S. health systems are developing tools to assist patients in determining whether a hospital visit is necessary or if an evaluation can occur remotely. By using online screening tools, handouts, and hotlines, patients can receive expert advice on a recommended course of action. In addition, some organizations are offering virtual visits free of charge to patients with COVID-19 symptoms, which provides patients with an opportunity to discuss their concerns with clinicians to determine an appropriate care plan.

During the current pandemic, health systems must prioritize ways to limit or prevent the exposure of healthy patients and staff to COVID-19. Several organizations have come up with strategies to facilitate remote screening of patients and are encouraging patients to take advantage of these opportunities to ensure they are safely screened or treated—even without an in-person visit in some cases. Some of the key tools and strategies are highlighted below.

1 | Patient-Facing Screeners

Several organizations have developed screening tools for patients with flu-like symptoms to get recommendations on the appropriate level of care, either in the hospital or at their homes virtually. The COVID-19 risk screening tool developed by Cleveland Clinic includes a series of questions on patient symptoms and travel history.

After the screener is completed, the tool automatically calculates an individual's risk for COVID-19 and then directs them to most appropriate care based on CDC guidelines. For example, if a patient is considered high risk, the tool may recommend that they start a virtual visit using Cleveland Clinic Express Care® Online.



Featured Resource: Cleveland Clinic's COVID-19 Risk Screening Tool

[Click here to access the online tool](#)

A similar screening tool with four questions on patient travel, contact history, and symptoms is used by CHI Health (click [here](#)). The need for COVID-19 testing is determined based on patients' answers, with assistance being provided when necessary. At Upstate Medical University, the online coronavirus assessment tool helps determine a patient's risk for infection development and lists the next steps regarding care and testing based on patient answers (click [here](#)).

2 | Free Virtual Visits

To reduce unnecessary ED visits, health systems have been relying on telehealth interventions to care for nonemergent conditions. A few organizations have even begun to provide free virtual visits to patients suspected of having COVID-19. For instance, Indiana University Health has launched a virtual clinic that offers free COVID-19 screenings for its patients through a virtual visit application (click [here](#)). Further treatment recommendations are made by the physicians based on the patient's status and severity of symptoms.

A similar intervention has also been initiated at Dignity Health, with virtual visits being available to patients as an alternative to hospital visits. The fee for a virtual visit can be waived for patients experiencing COVID-19 symptoms by using a coupon code on the organization's website.



Featured Resource: Dignity Health's Virtual Care Options

[Click here to access the health system's resources](#)

3 | COVID-19 Hotlines

Triaging patients, addressing their concerns, and directing them to required medical interventions helps manage patient flow in hospitals. A few organizations have set up hotlines where patients can call to discuss symptoms prior to an in-person visit. At Methodist Health System in Nebraska and Iowa, a hotline has been set up, which is staffed from 6:00 am to 11:00 pm every day. Patients experiencing fever, sore throat, cough, or difficulty breathing are encouraged to reach out to the operators via phone, and further actions are determined based on individual conditions.



Featured Resource: Methodist Health System's COVID-19 Hotline

[Click here to access the hotline](#)

Sutter Health has also launched a COVID-19 advice line at their facility, where patients can talk to clinicians about their care requirements (click [here](#)). These services are available daily from 8:00 am to 6:00 pm, and video visits can also be arranged for patients if necessary. Similarly, UVA Health patients are recommended to call the health system's hotline before going to a facility to determine the need for a visit (click [here](#)).

4 | Educational Handouts

Given that the COVID-19 scenario is changing each day, patients may feel overwhelmed and confused about the virus. To help improve patients' understanding of their symptoms and to dispel any misinformation that can lead to unnecessary visits or care avoidance, many organizations are developing public-facing resources and tools. For instance, along with publishing recommendations for patients on testing, the University of Utah Health also made available a resource that compares the common symptoms for COVID-19, the flu, and a common cold on its website (click [here](#)). The provision of such information can help improve patient knowledge on the virus itself, as well as when to seek medical care.



Featured Resource: University of Utah Health's COVID-19 Resources

[Click here to access the information on the website](#)

Additionally, a flyer published by UCLA Health provides guidance for patients on understanding their symptoms (click [here](#)). The resource includes a QR code that can be scanned to access the latest information on COVID-19. Increasing patients' access to this information can help them determine whether they should seek care virtually or if in-person intervention is required.

Have a question about this topic or another altogether? HBI's research team is on the case. Send a message to contact@hbinsights.com with your questions!

About the Analyst

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Vyshnavi is a research analyst at HBI with an educational background in pharmaceutical biotechnology. She has worked on a diverse range of cost and quality topics, including infection control, immunotherapy, behavioral health, obstetric and neonatal care, patient safety, and process improvement.

COVID-19 is an ongoing situation and organizations' processes are changing daily to adapt to various needs during this crisis. As such, this information is up-to-date as of April 2, 2020. HBI is continually monitoring the situation and updating material as we gather additional information. While HBI has attempted to ensure the accuracy of research provided in this document, the information has been obtained from numerous resources. Therefore, HBI cannot guarantee its accuracy and is not liable for any claims or losses that arise from errors or omissions within this document.