



State of New Jersey

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
DIVISION OF BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES
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JOSEPH CANALE
Acting Chief Executive Officer

May 27, 2020

Dear Employee,

Thank you for your support over the last few months. Our hospital employees are at the forefront of this pandemic. We at the hospital have remained steadfast in keeping everyone as safe as possible throughout the COVID-19 crisis. Please know that we are deeply saddened about the losses we have experienced during this pandemic, and our thoughts go out to all, who have also experienced loss during this difficult time.

However, despite the challenges of COVID-19, the Division of Behavioral Health Services (DBHS) and this hospital have taken action to ensure the safety of both our patients and staff through strict safety protocols and broad use of virtual and telephone visits to treat patients. In this time of uncertainty, we want to assure you of one thing—our commitment to our patients. The safety of our patients and employees are our top priority. Our hospital is continuing to follow the guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the New Jersey Department of Health (DOH) to ensure proper safety protocols are in place to protect patients and staff and policies and practices are re-assessed as guidance evolves concerning COVID-19.

The DOH/DBHS and hospital employees remain dedicated to serving our patients during this COVID-19 public health, State and national emergency, particularly as we serve some of the New Jersey's most vulnerable populations. We continue to closely assess this emergency daily, keeping patient and employee safety at the forefront and will make changes to our guidance as needed based on the most updated information from the CDC and NJDOH. Recently, we have been able to demonstrate a sustained reduction in new COVID-19 cases and medical hospitalizations.

This letter serves as an update to the informational letter dated April 2020.

- Since the onset of this pandemic, all patients suspected of COVID-19 have been tested and separated from the rest of the patient population while awaiting test results.

- Patients testing positive for COVID-19 have been placed on special units away from the rest of the patient population.
- All patients are monitored daily for fever and symptoms of COVID-19 infection.
- Unless refused, as of this date, all patients have been tested for the COVID-19 virus. Hospital psychiatrists and medical staff provided counseling and education to patients who refuse COVID-19 testing. Patients who test positive have been separated from the general patient population. Once medically cleared following CDC guidelines, patients are returned to the general population.
- Visitations, dining in the cafeterias and group programming were stopped.
- Patients have been asked to wear surgical masks.
- All staff are required to wear Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) which may include surgical mask, gown, gloves, protective eyewear and/or face shields.
- Staff working on COVID and Persons Under Investigation Units wear the general PPE along with N95 or KN95 masks and face shields and/or protective eyewear.
- Staff who have tested positive for the COVID-19 virus are to remain home for the time-frame designated by the NJDOH and provide a medical clearance note from their physician in order to return to work.
- Many staff were asked to work from home in order to prevent the spread of infection. Staff provide continuity of care to patients via telehealth.
- The COVID-19 pandemic can take an emotional toll on staff. Staff are encouraged to apply principles of self-care to help them cope with this challenging situation. For a comprehensive list of free and available resources please see <https://sites.rutgers.edu/shp-shpri/>.
- Staff coming to work have temperatures taken daily, are asked symptom questions pertaining to COVID-19 infection, are sent home if there are any positive responses, asked to contact their primary care physician, and must be medically cleared before returning to work.
- By the end of next week, we are going to begin testing staff, who previously tested negative or have never been tested for the presence of COVID-19 infection. Staff testing positive for COVID-19 will be required to stay home following the guidelines from NJ Department of Health. Any staff who previously tested positive will not be tested again.

For data regarding State Psychiatric Hospitals refer to the COVID-19 data dashboard available at: <https://covid19.nj.gov/#live-updates> and click on the State Psychiatric Hospitals tab.

Sincerely,



Joseph Canale
Acting Chief Executive Officer