

## Outreach Strategies and Sample Message for Maintaining Connections with Patients During the COVID-19 Emergency

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During this unprecedented time of COVID-19, it is critical for primary care and behavioral health providers to continue to maintain connections and provide care to their patients. This is particularly important for patients who have chronic health conditions, mental health conditions, and who have and/or are currently experiencing Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) or other adversities. Additionally, many people are experiencing stress and anxiety, which can exacerbate and lead to toxic stress-related health conditions.



This document provides outreach strategies that health care providers and practices can use proactively to seek and maintain connections with patients, as well as a sample message for communicating with patients to encourage telehealth during the COVID-19 emergency.

### Outreach Strategies

Since patient communication preferences and needs vary, using multiple outreach strategies increases the likelihood of reaching patients. Each practice must consider its capabilities and capacity to execute these strategies. Key outreach strategies include:

- 1) Include outreach messaging and answers to Frequently Asked Questions on **your practice's website** and change your practice's **phone script** to include this information at the beginning of the recording.
  - Consider adding [hotlines](https://covid19.ca.gov/resources-for-emotional-support-and-well-being/) to your website and messages so patients have resources for immediate help if needed – find hotlines at <https://covid19.ca.gov/resources-for-emotional-support-and-well-being/>.
- 2) **Send messages to all patients** using multiple methods of communication, such as:
  - a. Email
  - b. Secure message through patient portal
  - c. Text (send all, no reply)
  - d. Letter sent via U.S. mail

3) Identify patients to **prioritize for “higher touch” communication and outreach methods** (Figure 1.) **Higher need patients** include those who are/have:

- a. Chronic health conditions
- b. Time-sensitive preventive care needs, such as infants who need immunizations or well-child assessments
- c. Mental health and/or substance misuse diagnoses
- d. Experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness
- e. Experienced violence in the home
- f. Economically vulnerable/have social services needs
- g. African American, Latinx, American Indian/Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, since many have experienced disproportionate rates of COVID-19 infections and/or death.
- h. Asians. While rates of COVID-19 infection and/or death are proportionate to the population, there has been continued racist attacks directed at Asians, which can take an emotional toll.
- i. Other high needs, based on patient population

**Figure 1. “Higher touch” communication** is more personal and allows discussion and patient questions.

Methods include:



Phone call; and/or



Text

(with ability for patient to reply).  
Use multi-lingual text messaging, if possible.

- 4) **Engage office staff and be proactive** in reaching out to patients and scheduling appointments. Consider having office staff or others on your team make phone calls to offer telephone or video visits to all patients who:
- a. Have previously scheduled appointments;
  - b. Are due to schedule well-child visits or annual exams; and/or
  - c. Have higher health care and social service needs, such as those listed above.

## Sample Message to Patients Encouraging Telehealth During COVID-19 Emergency

Below is a sample message that health care providers and practices can use when reaching out to patients to encourage telehealth. The message should be tailored for your practice, including whether you are doing telephone and/or video health visits.

### **Subject: [Insert practice name] – We Are Here for You**

[For Pediatric Patients] We know this is a stressful time for parents and you are juggling a lot to keep yourself and your family well. Your child's well-child visits and vaccines are important, so we want to help you safely stay on schedule.

Please call us to find out whether you should bring your child in to see us or if a telephone or video visit is possible. [Insert language on the precautions your practice is taking to separate in-person well and sick visits]

[For Adult Patients] We know this is a stressful time and we want to make sure you keep getting the care you need. I am now doing telephone and video visits where we can discuss your health concerns, recommend treatments, and even conduct your annual wellness check-in – all without leaving your home.

[For All Patients] Did you know that Medi-Cal and other types of health insurance will cover telephone and video visits?

To schedule a telephone or video visit, call our main number at [xxx-xxx-xxxx]. [For practices that use a patient portal: You can also send me a secure message through the (insert patient portal name).]

We are here to help you get the care you need. Don't put it off – call us today!

**For information and resources on helping patients manage stress and anxiety related to COVID-19, visit [ACEsAware.org/covid19](https://ACEsAware.org/covid19).**