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**TO:** Acute Care Hospitals: Chief Executive Officers, Emergency Preparedness Personnel

**FROM:** Elizabeth Kelley, Director

Bureau of Health Care Safety and Quality

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**SUBJECT:** Mass Casualty Patient Tracking Protocol

**DATE:** April 11, 2024

This memorandum sets forth the Patient Tracking Protocol (Protocol) to be followed by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH or the Department) and receiving hospitals to track patients in the event there is a mass casualty incident (MCI) in the Commonwealth. This Protocol will be activated only in the event of a mass casualty incident as described in this document. This memorandum replaces Circular Letter DHCQ 15-10-642, issued on October 1, 2015.

**Background**

If there is a mass casualty incident that results in the transport of injured individuals to multiple hospitals within or outside the Commonwealth, there will be a need for timely and accurate information about their whereabouts in order to facilitate family reunification efforts. The Department has the authority to collect and maintain a central listing of personal health information (PHI) about individuals injured in such a MCI. Hospitals may, in compliance with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), release PHI to DPH for the purposes of supporting family reunification and notification.

**Patient Tracking Procedures**

In the event there is a MCI that results in the transport of injured individuals to multiple hospitals within or outside the Commonwealth, the Commissioner of Public Health (Commissioner) or designee may authorize activation of the Patient Tracking Protocol under the oversight of DPH. Once the Commissioner has activated the Protocol, a severe level Health and Homeland Alert Network (HHAN) alert will be sent immediately to notify all hospital emergency preparedness coordinators.

DPH, in collaboration with receiving hospitals, will coordinate collection of pre-identified patient identification information in order to create a single centralized listing of injured individuals (the Injured Patient List) to support necessary family reunification and notification efforts.

Pre-designated personnel at each receiving hospital outside of Boston will submit patient information via secure fax for all MCI-affected transported patients to the Patient Tracking Unit at the DPH Department Operations Center (DOC). Boston hospitals will submit their information to the BPHC Medical Intelligence Center (MIC) which will then forward its information to the DOC. (See below for Boston hospital protocol). The Patient Tracking Unit will maintain and update as necessary the central list of all MCI-affected patients received by hospitals.

The patient information to be provided by hospitals and the MIC to DPH is limited to the following:

1. First and Last Name
2. Patient Identification Number (if assigned)
3. Date of Birth
4. Gender
5. Nationality (if known)
6. Patient location and hospital contact information

After the Protocol has been activated, DPH will activate a call center and will establish and advertise a dedicated telephone line for calls from the public seeking information about individuals who may have been injured. Family reunification may also occur at a physical reception center or family assistance center if one is established.

The Department will collect the following information from people seeking to locate an individual who may have been transported to a hospital and will create the Matching List:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Information collected from seeker about **individual sought** | Information collected about the **seeker** |
| First and Last Name | First and Last name |
| DOB or age | Relationship |
| Gender | Primary phone number |

Where possible the Department will also collect the following additional information from people seeking to locate an individual who may have been transported to a hospital:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Information collected from seeker about **individual sought** | Information collected about the **seeker** |
| Primary language | Alternate phone number |
| Nickname | When did you last have contact? |
| Nationality or ethnicity | Have you checked with others? |
| Hair color | Why do you believe that the individual was affected by the incident? |
| Eye color |  |
| Description (e.g., height, weight, identifying marks, etc.) |  |

The Department will use the Injured Patient List and the Matching List to identify potential matches in efforts to support reunification.

Return calls will be made by trained personnel once a probable match has been made and will provide only information about the appropriate hospital point of contact to the seeker. The Department will not release any information about the patient’s condition to the seeker.

**Boston Hospital Protocol for Mass Casualty Patient Tracking**

In the event the Commissioner or designee authorizes activation of the Patient Tracking Protocol, Boston hospitals will send information to the MIC via EMTrack or other pre-designated methods. The MIC will coordinate with DPH on behalf of Boston hospitals.

The MIC will assign a lead for receiving, synthesizing, and sharing this information with DPH .

**Completion of Family Reunification and Notification**

Family reunification and notification efforts will be considered complete when the earlier of these actions occurs: (a) the Commissioner or designee terminates activation of the Patient Tracking Protocol, or (b) the Department has completed or attempted to complete family reunification or has notified the appropriate consulate about every potentially-identified individual on the DPH centralized list of individuals injured and transported to a hospital as a result of a mass casualty incident.

Once the family reunification and notification efforts are considered complete, a severe level HHAN alert will be sent to notify all hospital emergency preparedness coordinators.

For additional information please contact:

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