



COVID-19 Pandemic Emergency Response Plan

Introduction

Clinics such as the Teen Health Center, Inc. are considered “essential businesses” by the City and County of Galveston and the state of Texas. As such, Teen Health continues to treat medical and mental health patients via telehealth and, when medically necessary, in person at three local clinics. Children are at high risk of medical and mental health impacts during this crisis, as they are greatly affected by the drastic changes to daily routines, financial insecurity, and loss of regular social supports such as friends and sports. Teen Health’s ability to serve these children with preventive and primary care will reduce the patient load on Galveston’s front-line COVID-19 health workers and facilities. In addition, the financial crisis resulting from COVID-19 shutdowns means that more Galvestonians than ever are unemployed, uninsured, and unable to afford consultations with conventional providers. Teen Health is an important safety net for these families.

Teen Health’s most valuable resource is our staff. The agency is fortunate to employ and contract a group of highly dedicated professionals who are experienced in providing the best possible care with limited resources. Teen Health leadership anticipates maintaining all current staff positions for the entirety of this crisis by taking advantage of remote and other work options. The ability to quickly scale operations back up to normal levels will be essential when life returns to normal. Preserving jobs is also in the best interests of the community, as each person’s continued employment directly contributes to the area’s economy. To ensure continuity of funding, Teen Health’s management and board will regularly update funders on current operations and investigate backup options should an interruption to regular funding sources become inevitable.

Teen Health is dedicated to the health and well-being of our staff, patients, and community. Leadership will apply the following principles to all COVID-19-related decisions:

1. Keep Teen Health employees and contractors safe, physically and emotionally healthy, and employed.
2. Continue to treat patients with the highest possible standards.
3. Do our part to slow community spread of the virus and mitigate the mental health effects of the pandemic on our community.

Operational Continuity Plan

Tier 1 – moderate changes to operations

Trigger

School closures impact clinic operations.

Actions

Limit clinic visits to patients whose symptoms require in-person care and one accompanying loved one (typically a parent or guardian). Conduct all other visits, both medical and mental health, via telehealth.

Screen all patients for potential COVID-19 symptoms or exposure on the telephone. Screen them and accompanying loved one again at the door, including taking the temperature of both. Direct anyone whose screen indicates potential COVID-19 to their primary care physician, an urgent care center, or the emergency room.

When possible, provide in-person patients and accompanying adults with reusable masks to wear in the clinic and to take home with them, along with directions about how to safely handle and launder masks.

Cancel or reschedule all internal and external meetings as phone or video calls.

Develop systems that allow all employees to work from home if Tier 2 or 3 becomes necessary. Employees whose jobs can be completed remotely now begin working from home.

Develop policies for highly impacted employees to request remote assignment. Supervisors consider each request on a case-by-case basis and make decisions based on the three guiding principles, above, and whether the individual's job can be done remotely. Supervisors may modify work outputs to accommodate telecommuting.

An ad-hoc committee consisting of the board president and vice-president communicate as needed with stakeholders to plan for potential financial disruptions. The ad-hoc committee periodically reports to the board, places items requiring board approval on the board agenda, and shares the emergency plan with stakeholders.

In consultation with the board of directors, the Executive Director begins preparing (and submitting if the board deems appropriate) Small Business Administration Payroll Protection Program loan paperwork and making plans for operational continuity in case of Tier 2 or 3.

Tier 2 – significant limitation of operations

Triggers

Medical Director, Mental Health Director, and/or Physician Assistants are recalled to UTMB to assist with COVID-19 efforts.

Or

Galveston Independent School District revokes access to clinics.

Actions

The Executive Director and/or Medical Director negotiates retention of one Physician Assistant at Teen Health. One clinic remains open and the PA treats patients by telehealth unless seeing a patient in person is deemed essential. If Teen Health is unable to keep one PA, all medical care is suspended until the COVID-19 threat has passed and staff return to Teen Health.

If GISD revokes building access, Executive Director negotiates keeping one clinic open to continue in-person visits as needed. All other visits are conducted via telehealth. If no clinics can remain open, all medical visits are conducted via telehealth. Those that cannot be conducted via telehealth are postponed or referred elsewhere.

All other staff are required to work from a remote location. Some jobs may be modified to facilitate telework.

Executive Director and ad hoc committee continue to communicate with stakeholders and investigate potential funding disruptions.

Executive Director, Medical Director, and Mental Health Director, in consultation with the board of directors, decide which operations and staff are critical to the long-term sustainability of the organization in case of Tier 3.

Tier 3 – temporary cessation of some operations

Trigger

Philanthropic support decreases below what is needed to pay all staff and/or maintain operations.

Actions

If not already completed in Tier 1 or 2, Executive Director applies for Small Business Administration Payroll Protection Program loan to pay all staff for a minimum of eight weeks.

If SBA funding is not available, non-essential staff are furloughed, released, or have their hours and pay cut, depending on the current and long-term outlook of funding availability.

- After consultation with UTMB Department of Pediatrics and the Executive Director, the Medical Director makes the final decision regarding all staff in the medical program (PAs and aides).
- After consultation with the Executive Director, the Mental Health Director makes the final decision regarding all staff in the mental health program (therapists, intake coordinator, case managers).
- The Medical Director, Mental Health Director, and Executive Director, in consultation with UTMB psychiatry, jointly make decisions about psychiatry operations.
- After consultation with UTMB Department of Pediatrics and Teen Health's board of directors, the Executive Director makes the final decisions regarding the portion of the Medical Director's and Mental Health Director's time and salary that is allocated to Teen Health.
- The board of directors makes decisions regarding the Executive Director's time and compensation.

Funded staff continue working from home.

One-three clinics remain open as staffing and access allows to treat patients via telehealth unless treating a patient in person is deemed essential.

Mental health visits, meetings, and all other business is conducted online.

The Executive Director, Medical Director, Mental Health Director, and Board of Directors determine when to reopen clinics, bring staff to their regular campuses, and transition back to regular operations.

Tier 1, 2, and 3 Requirements

Upon initiation of Tier 1, and throughout Tiers 2 and 3 if they become necessary, all Teen Health employees and contractors are required to:

Maintain a detailed, regular cleaning schedule for shared spaces.

Office and home cleaning schedules should be increased. COVID-19 can easily spread, so staff should clean all shared surfaces daily. Areas that patients encounter should be cleaned between each patient. Some areas to consider include shared keyboards, faucets, coffee pots, cabinet handles, countertops, desktops, chair arms, keyboards, and doorknobs. Designate a specific trash bin for used PPE. If antibacterial cleansing wipes are unavailable, use traditional cleaners. If traditional cleaners are unavailable, use soap and water. Wash hands with soap and water frequently. Use hand sanitizers with at least 60% alcohol if hand washing is not possible.

Stay informed and prepared.

Stay informed about recent COVID-19 developments by reading and watching reputable sources such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the World Health Organization, the National Institutes for Health, and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. Keep at least two weeks' worth of food and other supplies on hand and a month's worth of medications; however, do not hoard food and supplies, which can prevent high-risk groups from accessing those goods.

Strictly limit outings and observe social distancing.

Employees should limit all outings to those that are absolutely necessary, such as trips to obtain medical care or to provide care to someone in great need and to obtain life-sustaining supplies such as food, medications, etc. Maintain strict social distancing. Employees should not gather with friends or family who are not living with them, regardless of whether they maintain 6 feet of separation or limit groups to 10 or fewer. Social gatherings cannot be made safe enough to protect the health of attendees. While in the office, maintain a minimum distance of 6 feet if possible. Move workstations so that they are at least 6 feet apart. Employees should maintain these distances at lunch or other break times.

Monitor health and stay home when sick.

In-office staff should take their temperature daily. If employees have a fever, feel unwell, or exhibit any signs of illness, they are required to stay home, even if symptoms do not mirror the known COVID-19 symptoms. Teen Health's regular sick leave policies will be relaxed during this crisis. Employees should notify their supervisor if they get sick and give him/her a number where they can be reached while recovering so Teen Health staff can make sure the employee is ok or help if assistance is needed.

Take care of mental health.

Helping others during the COVID-19 crisis can be extremely challenging. Employees may experience a variety of reactions, such as fear and poor concentration, that could affect their care for patients. Employees are encouraged to practice healthy coping strategies, including maintaining a scheduled routine, taking breaks as needed, eating nutritious foods, getting enough sleep and exercise, reaching out for support from others and maintaining a sense of community, engaging in fun distracting activities to trigger positive emotions, doing mindfulness and relaxation exercises, and being kind to oneself.

Delay making any changes to regular business operations that are not COVID-19-related.

Teen Health will adjust operations as necessary to respond to current and impending circumstances but will refrain from making significant decisions about long-term business plans during this time of heightened anxiety. Strategic planning is on hold, no contracts will be signed, and no other significant changes will be considered unless in direct response to the COVID-19 situation.