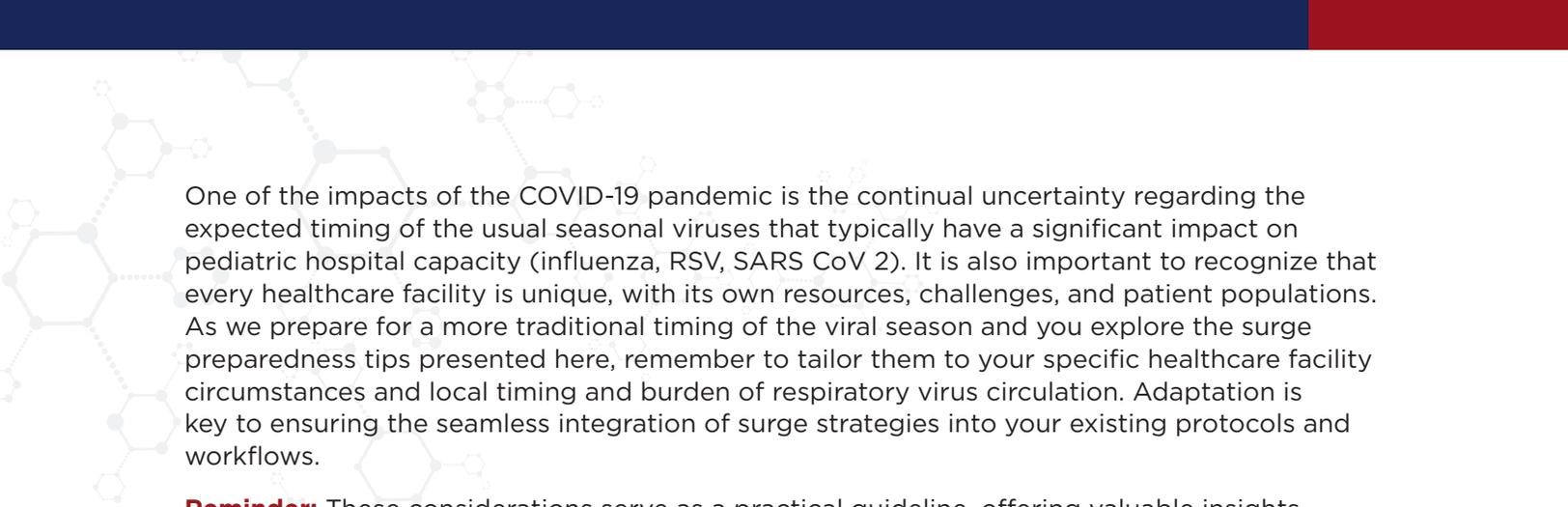




Pediatric Preparedness for the Winter Viral Surge



One of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic is the continual uncertainty regarding the expected timing of the usual seasonal viruses that typically have a significant impact on pediatric hospital capacity (influenza, RSV, SARS CoV 2). It is also important to recognize that every healthcare facility is unique, with its own resources, challenges, and patient populations. As we prepare for a more traditional timing of the viral season and you explore the surge preparedness tips presented here, remember to tailor them to your specific healthcare facility circumstances and local timing and burden of respiratory virus circulation. Adaptation is key to ensuring the seamless integration of surge strategies into your existing protocols and workflows.

Reminder: These considerations serve as a practical guideline, offering valuable insights and recommendations to facilitate discussions aimed at enhancing preparedness for the anticipated increase in viral cases during the upcoming winter season. It is imperative to strike a balance between operational requirements and patient quality and safety.

1. Adaptive Patient Flow

- Develop a patient flow strategy to minimize congestion and bottlenecks.
- Develop clear guidelines for patient triage based on severity and acuity.
- Consider implementing diverse testing mechanisms (drive-through, ED, referrals, etc.).
- Expand outpatient clinics and urgent care to provide after-hours appointments to help offload.
- Improve and ensure patient flow and throughput to limit patient boarding times.
- Implement efficient discharge processes to create space for new admissions.
- Consider setting up discharge lounges for patients awaiting discharge.
- Collaborate with facilities to prepare overflow spaces for patients in case of a surge.
- Consider repurposing non-clinical areas into patient care spaces.
- Expand telehealth services to provide care for patients remotely and reduce ED overcrowding.
- Support families to provide at-home care of patients with respiratory suctioning and home oxygen.

2. Viral Testing Options/ Patient Care

- Determine testing priorities and target groups for each viral illness (influenza, RSV, COVID-19, and others that may be included on multiplex PCR panels).
- Discuss appropriate testing strategies with your clinical microbiology and/or infectious diseases colleagues, and choose appropriate tests based on clinical indication, cost, and test performance (antigen testing vs. single pathogen target PCR vs. multiplex PCR).
- Judiciously use expensive multiplex PCR panels.
- Manage testing turnaround time and notifications of testing results.
- Plan and coordinate with the supply chain for limited testing supplies and develop contingencies.

3. Staffing Strategies

- Develop strategies to increase staffing quickly during a surge.
- Provide just-in-time training in caring for children.
- Plan for staffing shortages due to illness or caregiving.
- Consider implementing team staffing models when necessary to enhance patient ratios.
- Proactively enhance staffing plans to meet future demands.
- Sustain routine care, including preventative medicine visits.
- Support hospital flow to prevent patient boarding, but when necessary, staff boarding areas creatively to provide additional support for families.

4. Supply Chain Readiness

- Establish a supply chain contact and address ongoing shortages.
- Collaborate with pharmacy to manage medication needs and develop mitigation strategies for shortages.
- Collaborate with the laboratory to establish effective systems for supply monitoring, including both assays and testing supplies (pediatric-sized nasal/nasopharyngeal swabs and viral transport media).
- Plan for procurement and administration of routine childhood vaccines.

5. Communication and Coordination

- Establish a centralized communication hub to disseminate information.
- Keep all staff members informed about changes, surge plans, and protocols.
- Collaborate with community partners to streamline patient referrals and transfers.
- Communicate transparently with patients and families about surge-related changes.
- Provide resources to help patients and families understand new processes.

6. Healthcare Worker Support

- Implement measures to support healthcare workers' well-being and mental health.
- Provide resources for staff to cope with increased workloads and stress.

7. Community Engagement

- Encourage vaccination and other preventive measures to reduce the likelihood of surges.
- Identify strategies for improving healthcare access, education, and preventive measures such as vaccines to resource-poor areas and vulnerable populations.
- Connect with regional partners to share situational awareness for coordination of response and communication with the public.

8. Continuous Improvement

- Establish a robust data tracking system to monitor patient trends and resource utilization.
- Regularly review and adjust surge plans based on real-time data.
- Conduct post-surge debriefings to identify lessons learned and areas for improvement and update surge plans accordingly.

Remember, being proactive and prepared can make a significant difference in managing patient care effectively during viral outbreaks or other emergencies. Let these tips serve as a foundation upon which you can build a resilient and responsive surge management strategy.



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