

# Our Take: Leveraging Telemedicine as a Coronavirus Triage Resource

By Corporate Synergies  
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The headlines announcing updates on the spread of COVID-19, also known as the coronavirus, have taken over

media sources. That's because the virus is more severe than influenza, with an estimated 3.4% of global cases resulting in death.<sup>1</sup> The illness also has been difficult to track, because symptoms can take as many as 14 days to present after exposure. Most patients experience a high fever, dry cough and shortness of breath, though the severity of symptoms depends on the presence of underlying health conditions. Clearly, a coronavirus triage resource is needed right now.

As the spread of the virus grabs headlines across the globe, hospitals and health clinics are bracing for a rush of sick—and panicked—patients. As a result, some health systems are recommending telemedicine to triage patients.<sup>2</sup> Panicked people can flood already busy hospitals, while others who don't pay attention to obvious COVID-19 symptoms can inadvertently infect others.

Some employers are alleviating this pressure by allowing employees to work at home. Keeping patients at home is a significant advantage to preventing the spread of viruses, whether the common cold or something more sinister. Another option is providing telemedicine for employees. Telehealth services provide appropriate treatment for patients without exposing them to potential viral

transmission in busy doctors' offices and emergency rooms. In-home video visits limit community exposure by allowing patients to avoid contact with other patients in waiting rooms and direct contact with providers during the exam.<sup>3</sup> It can also provide treatment recommendations to callers while minimizing the potential spread from time spent outside the home.

Telemedicine may prove to be an effective and socially responsible coronavirus triage option.

Another advantage of telemedicine is speed. Patients can access clinicians 24/7. The low cost is also an attribute of telemedicine, which typically incurs no added expense to employees; most plans charge only a regular co-pay.

A combination of telemedicine as a health resource for people with non-emergency flu or cold symptoms, and a quick [employee education and communications](#) campaign to inform plan participants how to use telehealth services, can alleviate fear and serve as an effective way for employers to handle the coronavirus crisis. ■

<sup>1</sup>[World Health Organization](#), "WHO Director-General's Opening Remarks at Media Briefing on COVID"

<sup>2</sup>[CNBC](#), "Coronavirus Could be a Boon for Telemedicine"

<sup>3</sup>[Modern Healthcare](#), "Congress Must Act to Ensure Telehealth can be Used to Combat Coronavirus"

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