

New Ways of Doing Business: Best Practices for Employee and Patient Safety



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During the COVID-19 pandemic, home medical equipment (HME) providers learned to be even more resourceful than usual. They found new ways to do business, allowing them to stay open and serve their patients safely. And we all learned how we can better prepare for a national emergency like a global pandemic.

As businesses reopen and we settle into the new “normal,” it’s important now more than ever to consider these best practices for the (un)foreseeable future in order to protect your patients and employees.

Open for Business

As an HME provider, patients will always rely on you as an essential part of the care continuum. And as an essential business, there are best practices to consider to ensure you continue keeping those entering your place of business safe, including your employees.

- **Staff and Patient Safety:** Nothing is more important than the safety of your staff and patients. Stay up to date on [CDC guidelines](#), as well as those set out by your state and local officials, and ensure your staff is educated. You might also consider continuing to limit your store hours and maintaining increased cleaning schedules in addition to some of the other recommendations found in this document.
- **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE):** PPE such as masks, gloves, and gowns should continue to be available, and staff should have a thorough knowledge regarding its use—including where it’s kept and when/how to use it.
- **Staff Illness Protocols:** As a general safety measure, it’s important to continue to adhere to policies regarding employee illness. If an employee isn’t feeling well or has been around someone else who is ill, they should not come to work.

Pickup Ready

Many businesses already offer patient pickup and drop-off of equipment, and it’s a good business practice to keep moving forward—especially for your more vulnerable patients and customers. Here are some ways to make it work.

- **No-Contact Curbside Service Options:** Have patients call and schedule a time to either pick up or drop off their equipment. When they arrive (have them provide a way to recognize their vehicle or call if they have a cellphone), staff can (un)load the equipment with minimal direct contact.
- **Rental Equipment Cleaning Procedures:** Equipment cleaning isn’t a new thing, but it’s worth continuing to be extra diligent knowing what we know now. Here are some things to keep in mind:
 - o Create sections for clean and dirty equipment, if they don’t already exist, and make sure equipment is in the correct area.
 - o Use the right cleaning product for a given piece of equipment. Remember—bedding and upholstered equipment often have their own requirements.
 - o Allow appropriate contact time (i.e., the time a product must stay on a piece of equipment to disinfect it). Some pathogens, such as mycobacterium tuberculosis, require as much as 10 minutes of contact time to be eradicated.



- o Make safety data sheets (SDS) available for all cleaners and disinfectants your business uses and ensure the staff knows where the information is stored or how to access it.
- o Keep complete documentation of the cleaning/disinfecting process. This includes both in-store areas, rental equipment, and reusable PPE.
- **Staff Safety Before and After Pickup:** Staff safety really comes down to consistent procedures. Keep up with your environmental cleaning and ensure the staff maintains best practices for donning and doffing applicable PPE.

Out for Delivery

Home deliveries increased for most essential businesses during the pandemic, and it's likely a service that's here to stay. More deliveries, however, can mean more staff on the road and with it, more risk. Be sure to consider the following when setting up or bolstering your equipment delivery services.

- **Drop Off Outside the Home:** Whenever possible, avoid sending staff inside the home of a patient. Instead, conduct drop-offs and pickups outside the home.
- **No-Contact Signing for Deliveries:** The signature is essential for proof of delivery. If you're dropping equipment off at the home, use an electronic signature program or get as much confirmation as you can—even a voice or video recording of the patient acknowledging receipt of the item is useful.
- **Essential Equipment Set Up in the Home:** Not everything can be dropped off, and there are times when it's essential to enter a patient's home. When this is the case, it's a good idea to continue following these best practices:
 - o Only staff who have not experienced symptoms of illness should be allowed to deliver inside the home.
 - o Only enter a home if absolutely necessary and touch only what you must in order to set up the equipment.
 - o Continue to wear appropriate PPE.
 - o Try to keep an appropriate level of distance between yourself and the patient if possible.
 - o Avoid exchanging items with patients—use your no-contact signing method even though you've entered the home.
 - o Keep detailed notes of the in-home delivery for the patient file.
 - o Disinfect or wash your hands and delivery vehicle after the delivery.
- **More Deliveries:** With an uptick in deliveries, it's best to double check that [you're prepared](#).
 - o Make sure you have the right Business Auto insurance coverage in place, based on whether employees are using personal or company vehicles, and for which purposes.
 - o Provide mandatory driver safety training to all new drivers, including education on the company's driving policy.
 - o Review the Motor Vehicle Record (MVR) of all employee drivers to ensure they are acceptable.
 - o Conduct detailed safety inspections on all vehicles that will be making deliveries.



Going Online

With a need to limit direct contact with patients and customers during the pandemic, many providers embraced telehealth technology wherever applicable to stay in touch. Providers conducted services such as virtual equipment setups, patient education and Q&A sessions, and patient check-ins and follow-ups online. With the efficiencies and cost savings that telehealth provides, many businesses are likely to continue offering virtual services to patients. However, it's important to be aware of [the risks associated with telehealth](#) and be proactive about mitigating them.

- **Documentation, Privacy, and Compliance:** Any interaction with a patient, even via telehealth technology, should be documented in the patient's file. Access to this documentation should comply with existing privacy and security policies and regulations.
- **Staff Training:** Staff should continue to receive periodic training in how to effectively use telehealth services in patient treatment. This should include the technical aspects of the technology, role-specific information, and expectations.
- **Legal/Regulatory:** Ensure your telehealth practices remain in compliance with federal law, as well as the laws in your state and the state of every patient you're treating. Don't forget to involve your legal counsel and insurance provider.
- **Technology and Data Security:** Low-quality equipment can make communication and diagnosis difficult, so consider upgrading your equipment if you're going to continue offering telehealth services long-term. Be mindful that no business is too small to be targeted by a cyberattack. Make sure your cybersecurity is up to date.

The New HME

COVID-19 defined a challenging time for everyone involved. But while the changes providers like you were forced to make created mass disruption, a version of this new way of providing HME care was always on the horizon. By taking the proper steps to embrace these new ways of doing business and proactively managing the risks involved, you're setting yourself up for growth and success—and you'll be ready for whatever comes our way next.

For more information about how you can manage your business' risk and to ensure you have adequate coverage, reach out to your VGM Insurance Services Account Manager or contact us today at info@vgminsurance.com or 800-362-3363.

