



July 29, 2020

## **Lab Experts Committee Report; Optometry Safety Standards**

Dear ESC Local 20 Medical Professionals:

We write today with these updates:

### **1. ESC Local 20 Lab Experts Committee, July meeting report**

The ESC Local 20 Lab Experts Committee met on July 8 to talk about best practices for staying safe in the Lab and addressing common safety concerns reported across many different employers. The highlights of the discussion and recommended areas for investigation in all labs are below.

#### ***Is the Biosafety Cabinet Adequate for Testing Load?***

*With the addition of COVID-19 testing, already tight quarters in the lab are getting even worse. This is a good time to evaluate if there is adequate space under the biosafety hood for safe and efficient testing, and enough room to keep all lab professionals safe. Does your lab need to de-clutter its biosafety cabinet? Is another biosafety cabinet needed?*

#### ***Patient Screening: Is it working?***

*Despite various procedures in place to screen and identify Patients Under Investigation (PUIs) or COVID-19+ patients, in some areas staff are unknowingly coming into contact with these patients and, therefore, not taking proper PPE precautions. Even though most Lab Professionals do not come into direct contact with patients, other medical personnel, like a phlebotomist, may inadvertently carry exposure into the Lab if they do not know the full information about their patient. It is important that screeners, who in some cases are reassigned workers, receive proper training and support to avoid inadvertent spread of COVID-19.*

#### ***Proper PPE***

*Aprons, gowns, sleeves, and lab coats are essential for the protection of Lab Professionals, especially with the onset of COVID-19, and access to this PPE should be abundant. Unfortunately, reports indicate a dramatic fluctuation in the availability of this equipment. We need a consistent and constant supply of all necessary PPE to stop the spread of COVID-19 and to protect workers.*

If you are experiencing any of these or other safety issues in your labs, please work with your steward and union representative to address them with management. It is up to us, as experts in our fields, to demand these very basic standards of safety in all our labs. In doing so, we do our part to help stop the spread of COVID-19.

## **2. Kaiser Optometry Creates and Enforces Safety Standards**

Our ODs and OAs have developed a standard of care in "reactivated" offices to ensure patient and worker safety. This is not an official agreement with Kaiser, but thanks to unity and pressure from our members, all KP facilities now have adopted these practices.

The standard is called "8-9-10, Screen Them Again." This is shorthand for a daily schedule of 8 telephone appointments, 9 in-person appointments with 10 minutes of time for cleaning of equipment between each in-person visit, and calls to incoming patients to verify that there are no COVID-19 health concerns. Our professionals believe that this is a workable and safe plan for operations.

Not all optometry facilities initially were willing to implement the standard. In response, our ODs and OAs stood together to advocate for patient and worker safety. We delivered signatures and messages from more than 250 optometry professionals to recalcitrant managers at South Sacramento -- and the pressure and solidarity worked. The top leadership of this facility overrode the poor judgment of the department leaders and committed to adjusting all schedules to reflect the Union standard of care.

In this difficult time, this effort by the Optometry Unit is an example of how we can and must stand together to lead the way on safety. If you have a concern about safety in your workplace, contact your steward or union rep.

## **3. Demanding Support for Family Care**

It is becoming clear that most schools will not reopen in the fall. This creates a new and severe set of challenges for our members who rely on childcare.

ESC Local 20 is looking at a variety of alternatives for members who face these issues. We are available to assist with possible solutions for individuals, such as schedule changes, reduced hours, or leaves. In addition, we are seeking enhanced support for child care and family leaves. One such effort is a petition to Kaiser, with our Coalition partners, to bring back the child care stipend that was available this past spring in response to the pandemic. Here is the Coalition's [Open Letter to Kaiser](#) on this subject.

We thank you again for your essential work and expertise.

In solidarity,

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