

# Nurse Safety from Effects of COVID-19 in the Practice Environment

Med-surg nursing workplaces have put patient and nurse safety first to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

But when coronavirus is on the rise and the pressure is on, med-surg nurses can face hard choices. AMSN has your back. Here's a med-surg nurse's checklist to help you take positive action for patient safety – and for yours. Our checklist is separated into three areas, each with initiatives you can undertake in order:

## **A. Promote COVID-19 safety in your workplace**

\_\_\_ **1. Talk with your supervisor or chief.** A private, one-on-one discussion can solve many problems. A supervisor might understand the situation from a high level – and need your front-line perspective. Bring specific evidence, your own facility's standards, and the [current COVID-19 guidance for health care professionals from the Centers for Disease Control and Preventions \(CDC\)](#). Don't stop there: propose solutions.

\_\_\_ **1a. In a collectively bargained or unionized work environment,** bring your evidence, standards and solutions to your shop steward.

\_\_\_ **2. Bring it to your facility's human resources (HR) function.** Use the same approach as you brought to your supervisor: evidence, standards, solutions. Be aware HR works for the facility and its management.

\_\_\_ **3. If you feel it is necessary to go outside your organization, file a report with the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA)** in your state. Again, bring evidence, standards and solutions. In the U.S., you can find the OSHA office in your state [at this link](#) and file a complaint [using this link](#). In Canada, you can file a complaint [using this link](#). In the EU, information is [available at this link](#).

\_\_\_ **4. If you believe your employer retaliated against you for exercising your rights as an employee under the U.S. Whistleblower Protection Act,** you can file a complaint [using this link](#); scroll to the bottom. Outside the U.S., seek an official workplace compliance resource with your government.

\_\_\_ **5. If the availability of staffing is an issue,** AMSN offers a [COVID-19 Staffing Toolkit](#) that can help.

## **B. Take care of you**

\_\_\_ **1. Find and use mental health, wellness and therapy resources your employer provides,** such as your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) and health care benefits. You and your employer have been paying for them – put them to use.

\_\_\_ **2. If appropriate, engage your facility's Critical Incident Report (CIR) program.** COVID-19 care can be traumatic for med-surg nurses. [Understanding critical incidents is vital.](#) Supporting learning and practice improvement helps nurses in difficult situations and advances patient safety. If your facility has no CIR program, see C.2. below.

\_\_\_ **3. Join a Second Victim Peer Support group.** Caring for COVID-19 patients and keeping patient and med-surg nursing safety can be traumatizing, especially over a long period. It may help to seek the support of others and not go it alone. Start with [this resource from the Joint Commission.](#)

\_\_\_ **4. Find professional resources for your mental health.** Review the American Counseling Association (ACA) Trauma and Disaster Mental Health resource guide. [ACA's extensive information is here.](#) The federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration ([SAMHSA](#)) also provides [national Disaster Distress Helpline resources](#) that can connect you with a professional counselor.

\_\_\_ **5. Reach out to your med-surg nursing colleagues who are our AMSN community** on the [AMSN Hub](#) and through [AMSN Chapter organizations.](#) While other med-surg nurses are a wonderful resource, they are not professionally trained and credentialed in mental health. Also, do not use the

AMSN Hub or AMSN forums to post any personal health information (PHI). Distributing PHI is a federal crime with fines and penalties.

## **C. Demonstrate leadership**

\_\_\_ **1. Make your voice heard by using the [AMSN Legislative Action Center](#) to write your state and federal policymakers.** So long as the COVID-19

AMSN HAS YOUR BACK.

YOUR QUESTIONS ARE WELCOME AT [AMSN@AMSN.ORG](mailto:AMSN@AMSN.ORG).

OR YOU CAN ASK YOUR MED-SURG NURSING COLLEAGUES ON THE AMSN HUB, [HTTPS://COMMUNITY.AMSN.ORG/HOME](https://community.amsn.org/home).

pandemic is with us, AMSN will provide members resources to contact Congress and your state capital with med-surg nursing priorities for stopping the spread and protecting frontline health care professionals. To contact officials in Canada, [use this link](#). To contact officials of the EU, [use this link](#); individual member nations' elected officials are separate.

\_\_\_ **2. Support development of a Critical Incident Reporting program at your facility.** Many resources are available to help you bring a proposal to your supervisor or chief nursing officer. They include the Agency for Health Care Research & Quality (AHRQ) [primer on reporting patient safety events](#), the AHRQ [system-focused event investigation and analysis guide](#), and a *Journal of Nursing Management* [paper on factors contributing to incident reporting among nurses](#).

*Reviewed by Yalanda Comeaux  
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