As medical practices begin the process of reopening after the COVID-19 shut down, one of the more difficult parts of the process may be communicating with patients and others.

Patients, who have spent months at home hearing about the dangers of the pandemic, may not know that it is okay to come to the practice for routine, non-COVID check-ups and treatments. They may also be afraid of the risk of infection that could come from interacting with the health care system.

In response, the California Medical Association (CMA) is organizing a comprehensive communications effort aimed at educating patients that, with the proper safety protocols in place, they should move forward with routine and non-urgent medical visits.

Along with CMA’s effort, many practices will want to communicate directly with patients about their reopening. This document provides physicians with templates to use for effective patient communication. These templates are intended to be general guides, and should be adjusted based on the needs of an individual practice or patient group.

CMA recommends that physicians take the following steps:

1. **Email patients about reopening and safety protocols.**
   A clear, concise communication from your practice can serve two important purposes: 1) lets your patients know that you are open for routine and non-urgent visits; and 2) gives you an opportunity to explain safety protocols and how they will affect the patient experience. Many safety protocols require participation from your patients so letting them know ahead of time will ease the process of reopening. (See Template #1.)

2. **Leverage the power of social media to spread your message.**
   Many practices are utilizing Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and others to interact with patients. The limited space available in social media posts can make it difficult to explain all the changes you are making, but you can use it to drive patients to your practice website. (See Template #2.)

3. **Post clear signage in and around your office.**
   A few clearly posted signs can help patients unaware of your safety protocols adapt accordingly. (See Template #3.)

4. **Notify physicians in your medical group, IPA and/or referral network that you are open for business.**
   All physicians should consider sending notice to any medical groups and IPAs with which you contract as it is important to notify physicians in your referral network that your practice is open. (See Template #4.)

For more information about reopening your practice, see CMA’s reopening resources at cmadocs.org/covid-19.
Template #1: Practice Reopening Email

Dear Patient,

We hope this letter finds you and your family in good health. Our community has been through a lot over the last few months, so we are excited to announce that our medical practice is now reopen for routine and non-urgent visits.

We look forward to serving you and wanted to provide information on new processes for your next appointment. All changes have been made in accordance with guidance from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) and California Medical Association (CMA) to protect our patients and staff:

+ My staff will be in contact to ask a few screening questions before your scheduled appointment. There may be additional questions when you arrive at our office.
+ Please remain in your car, and call or text {{INSERT PHONE NUMBER}} when you arrive. A staff member will come out to escort you to the appointment.
+ No guests or visitors will be allowed to join patients, except for parents of young children or caregivers for elderly or infirm patients.
+ Some patients will be offered the option of a virtual visit from our staff utilizing {{INSERT PLATFORM}}. Please know that you will still receive the same standard of care you have come to expect from us.
+ You may be asked to wash your hands or to use the hand sanitizer as soon as you enter the office.
+ Our waiting room will no longer offer magazines, children’s toys and other items that are difficult to clean.
+ You may be offered fewer scheduling options for your appointment to allow for physical distancing between patients.
+ Please wear a face covering to protect yourself, other patients and our staff (young children and those with health conditions that preclude wearing a mask are exempted). While you may not feel you need one, in case you are an asymptomatic carrier of the virus, we know masks help prevent the spread of the virus, and we see high-risk patients in our practice. We thank you for helping protect them.

We look forward to seeing you again and are happy to answer any questions you may have. To make an appointment, please call {{INSERT PHONE NUMBER}} or visit {{INSERT WEB ADDRESS}}.

Most of all, thank you for being our patient. We value your trust and loyalty, and we look forward to welcoming you back to our office.

Sincerely,

{{INSERT NAME}}
Template #2: Reopening Sample Social Media Posts

Facebook/LinkedIn:

#1:
To Our Valued Patients: {{INSERT PRACTICE NAME}} is open and ready to serve you! Our practice is now scheduling routine and non-urgent visits, including screenings and vaccinations {{OR WHATEVER IS APPLICABLE TO YOUR PRACTICE}}. Call us today at {{INSERT PHONE NUMBER}} to schedule an appointment.

#2:
To Our Valued Patients: After a few difficult months, {{INSERT PRACTICE NAME}} is reopening for routine, non-urgent visits. To make this reopening happen, we have implemented a few changes to keep you and our staff safe: {{INSERT URL}}.

Twitter:

#1:
@{{INSERT TWITTER HANDLE}} is open! To schedule an appointment or learn how we are keeping you safe, visit {{INSERT URL}} or call {{INSERT PHONE NUMBER}}.

#2:
@{{INSERT TWITTER HANDLE}} is open, and with important changes to keep you healthy. Visit visit {{INSERT URL}} or call {{INSERT PHONE NUMBER}} to learn more.

Template #3: Office Signage Regarding Safety Protocols

Coronavirus Prevention
{{INSERT PRACTICE NAME}} is taking the following measures to keep you healthy during the coronavirus pandemic:

+ Patients will remain in their car and text upon arrival for staff to escort them into their exam room (please let staff know of mobility issues)
+ Patients will wear a face covering while in the office – children and health conditions that preclude from wearing a mask are exempted
+ Staff will continue to clean tables and chairs in exam rooms between patient visits, as well as increase the frequency of waiting room and office cleanings
+ Staff have removed books and magazines from the waiting room and exam rooms
+ Continuing to clean our hands and other equipment between all patient visits

Keeping you and your family safe and healthy is our first priority!
Template #4: Practice Referral Network, Medical Group or IPA Email

Dear Colleague:

I am pleased to announce that {{INSERT PRACTICE NAME}} has reopened our doors for routine and non-urgent visits. You are welcome to refer patients to us.

Please know we are currently scheduling the backlog of canceled and delayed patients over the last few months, and we are spacing out appointments to keep patients safe. Know that we are working as fast as we can to see all the patients who need our help.

We are also offering telehealth appointments, via {{INSERT PLATFORM}}, when medically appropriate.

Thank you for the trust you have placed in us over the years. We look forward to continuing to work with you.

Signed,

{{INSERT NAME}}