



Nursing Home COVID-19 Update – June 4, 2020

Dear Members of the General Assembly:

We wanted to provide an update on the status of skilled nursing homes during this time of COVID-19. We know that nursing homes continue to be of great concern and since our last communication on May 14 there has been advancement in the areas of testing and the use of the alternative recovery centers. We hope that you find the following update useful and if you need any additional information, please do not hesitate to contact us. We also strongly encourage you to reach out to the administrators of the nursing homes in your district. The nursing home staff and administration have been working tirelessly under unprecedented conditions put forth by this novel coronavirus, and your outreach would be well received and they would be happy to answer any of your questions. We would be happy to facilitate discussions or meetings if that would be helpful.

It is becoming increasingly clear, based on medical and scientific evidence, that a high prevalence of COVID-19 in Connecticut nursing homes and across the country may be explained by the suspected transmission of this highly contagious virus from persons showing no symptoms. We believe this transmission began in late winter when there was a growing, but not yet fully recognized presence of COVID-19 in the community. Once CDC became aware of this characteristic of the virus in late March, it followed that both universal source control (universal masking) and a testing-based strategy were needed to protect against the asymptomatic transmission and effectively combat the outbreaks. However, while the CDC implemented universal source control on April 4, the testing of residents and employees only became possible in mid-May when the testing materials, laboratory capacity and PPE needed to perform the test swabbing became available. Consequently, nursing homes, following all of the CDC guidance to the letter, were losing ground to COVID-19 during the early months of this pandemic.

Testing:

In mid-May, the Department of Public Health was able to obtain a major supply of testing kits and as a result, they initiated a strategic testing plan for all nursing home residents. As a result of the plan, all nursing homes have now conducted point prevalence survey testing on all of their residents, the results of which then informed scientifically directed cohorting of the residents. Now that the initial point prevalence testing of residents has been completed, the Governor [has announced that the weekly testing of staff](#) will begin on June 14. We are awaiting additional guidance on the staff testing as well as the plan for continuous testing of residents.

DPH Inspections:

The Department of Public Health has now conducted multiple onsite infection control focused inspections at every nursing home in the state. With over 1,000 inspections completed, they plan to continue this aggressive inspection schedule. In addition, the state will now place Infection Control Support Nurses into the nursing homes to monitor all shifts, seven days per week to supplement the duties of the DPH Nurse Consultants who are conducting the inspections. This is more oversight than any other state in the country. In fact, nationwide, only 54% of nursing homes have had even one inspection.

PPE:

The acquisition of PPE continues to be a top priority and is an exhausting undertaking for nursing homes. The cost of purchasing PPE supplies remains high and the supply chain is not yet adequate. We do appreciate the additional PPE provided by the state and federal governments and the supply at each individual nursing home is monitored by the State through the DPH onsite inspections and through daily on line reporting.

COVID-19 Alternative Recovery Centers:

The Alternative Recovery Centers have addressed the crucial hospital surge issues by being readily available to accept COVID-19 positive discharges from the hospital. Now, with hospitalizations due to

COVID-19 decreasing, the alternative recovery centers have been made available to accept COVID-19 positive voluntary transfers from traditional nursing homes, residential care homes and assisted living communities.

Funding:

The need for additional funding cannot be overstated as nursing home costs and PPE expenses have risen and we will eventually need to shoulder the cost of testing. COVID-19 related costs are many and can include wage increases, bonuses, staffing agency fees, additional PTO, PPE equipment, screening expenses, staff meals, childcare arrangements, additional sanitizing products and equipment, and electronic communication equipment. The state provided an initial increase of 10% in the rate system for March and April, but additional funding anticipated for May and June has not yet been distributed.

This increased funding is to be used for all COVID-19 related expenses and is expected to come from the \$1.4 billion in federal Coronavirus Relief Fund monies received by the state. **We again want to emphasize the State will require a full accounting of crisis related costs compared to the amount of state and federal funding received by each home and any excess funding received will be returned by the homes to the state.**

Communications:

From day one of the pandemic we have encouraged our members to be as transparent as possible with residents and families with regard to the status of COVID-19 cases. In addition, Connecticut nursing homes have always been required to report cases of COVID-19 to the Department of Public Health and the State has been publicly reporting cases on a weekly basis. In May, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) issued a federal requirement that nursing homes report cases of COVID-19 to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and notify residents and families.

Family Visitation:

There remains a state and federal ban on visitation within the nursing home, but providers have been aggressively working to facilitate virtual and window visits with family and friends whenever possible. With the nicer weather coming, many nursing homes are now planning to facilitate outdoor visits.

Moving Forward:

These are unprecedented times that have affected every person, business, and institution in the state, including our nursing homes. We will get through this and when we do, we are eager to work together with our State's elected officials, medical and public health experts and our members to engage in a meaningful assessment of the experience created by this pandemic, and to evaluate and implement any and all improvements identified as necessary in our system of aging services.

We hope that you have found this update to be useful and informative. We thank you for your support of nursing homes, for your efforts to provide the resources they need to fight the battle against this virus and for your recognition of their important role in the health care system. Please do not hesitate to reach out to us at any time with questions or to request more details on anything mentioned in this letter.

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