



### *Nursing Home COVID-19 Update – November 2020*

Dear Members of the General Assembly:

As we approach the holiday season, we thought it would be timely to provide an update on the status of nursing homes during this time of COVID-19. We hope that you find the following information useful and if you need any additional information, please do not hesitate to contact us.

#### **Visitation:**

**Visitation is now regulated by the federal government's Centers for Medicare and Medicaid (CMS)** which is the federal agency that oversees nursing homes. On September 17, 2020, CMS issued the [QSO-20-39-NH](#) memo that outlines the visitation regulations and which opened up indoor visitation. As a result, in the absence of a COVID-19 outbreak in the facility, nursing homes are now able to accommodate indoor visitation. **Indoor compassionate care visits can continue even during an outbreak.**

#### **DPH and LTC Ombudsman Letter, and CDC Guidance on Safe Visitation and Risks for the Holidays:**

DPH Acting Commissioner Deidre Gifford and the state's LTC Ombudsman Mairead Painter have issued [timely and important safe holiday guidance](#) for long term care residents. The letter incorporates the recently issued CDC and CMS holiday guidance.

#### **Testing:**

The State of Connecticut continues to support the Care Partner testing initiative for nursing homes. The Care Partner program conducts the now **weekly staff screening using PCR testing, as well as the weekly outbreak PCR testing of both residents and staff when there is a positive case in the facility.** The state will continue to financially support the Care Partner testing through March 31, 2021, for which we are extremely grateful.

- Nursing homes also received antigen (rapid test) testing machines from the federal government that are being used to supplement the Care Partner testing.
- The Department of Public Health has called for an **additional point prevalence testing of all residents** during the two-week period following the Thanksgiving weekend.

#### **Vaccine:**

Nursing home residents are expected to receive the Covid-19 vaccine through a **federal nationwide partnership program with CVS and Walgreens. The plan is to have the vaccines delivered and administered on site by one of the pharmacies.** Nursing homes and assisted living communities have already signed up for this distribution program and the state will recognize this program within their own vaccine distribution planning process.

### **Community Prevalence and Nursing Home Outbreaks:**

We are currently experiencing an increase in the incidence of outbreaks in nursing homes. An outbreak is considered at least one positive test result amongst staff or one facility acquired positive result amongst the residents, and this **rise in outbreaks correlates with the rise of community prevalence.**

**Working in partnership with the Department of Public Health, our associations are leading a strong and concerted effort amongst our members and their staff to maintain safe practices outside of the facilities and to prevent the entrance and spread of the virus within the nursing homes.** We are also closely monitoring the outbreaks, especially the potential for staffing shortages than can arise during outbreaks.

### **Nursing Home Occupancy Issues:**

Our two associations are continuing an important dialogue with DSS, DPH, OPM and DRS on the ongoing occupancy issues the sector is facing during this crisis and the related financial challenges nursing homes continue to face as a result. We have requested financial relief which is under consideration.

### **The Nursing Home and Assisted Living Oversight Working Group (NHALOWG):**

Our associations are working with the NHALOWG and its four subcommittees to address the outstanding issues identified in the Mathematica Report on the initial and early response to the pandemic. You may be reassured to know that many of the issues identified in the report have already been addressed through the work of the Department of Public Health and other state agencies, in concert with the hard work of the nursing home sector. Information about this working group and the Mathematica Report can be found on the [Appropriations Committee website](#).

### **DPH Regulation and Inspections:**

The Department of Public Health continues to conduct onsite infection control focused inspections at every nursing home in the state.

### **PPE:**

The Department of Public Health has **mandated that all nursing homes maintain a stockpile of PPE that is immediately accessible if an outbreak occurs.** This stockpile is in addition to the daily PPE supplies maintained by the nursing home and routinely reported to DPH. And, while the State has paused their weekly distributions of PPE, they continue to maintain a stockpile that can be requested by a provider in an urgent situation.

### **COVID-19 Alternative Recovery Centers:**

The Alternative Recovery Centers are reopening in a phased manner and there are beds currently available to accept COVID positive hospital, assisted living and nursing home residents in need of a skilled level of care during their recovery.

**In closing,** this year has certainly been one of great challenges and heartache, and we want you to know that all our members have been fighting with everything they have to keep our nursing home staff and residents safe during this time. We thank you for your support, 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.

We hope that you have found this update to be useful and informative. 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.

We also encourage you to reach out to the administrators of the nursing homes in your districts. The nursing home staff and administration have been working tirelessly under unprecedented conditions put forth by this novel coronavirus. 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.

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