Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Information for Long-term Care Facilities (LTCF)
March 1, 2020

Many LTCF within New Hampshire are concerned about how the current outbreak of COVID-19 will impact their residents, staff and visitors, and are seeking ways to stay healthy. The New Hampshire Division of Public Health Services (NH DPHS) is working with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to support our LTCF by developing guidance and education materials. In addition to this guidance, please review CDC’s COVID-19 guidance for LTCF.

What is the difference between seasonal coronaviruses and the virus causing COVID-19?
Coronaviruses are a family of viruses. Some coronaviruses cause the common cold, but the virus causing COVID-19 is a new type of coronavirus that we believe moved from animals into humans and is infecting people for the first time.

What are common symptoms of COVID-19?
For confirmed COVID-19 cases, reported illnesses have ranged from mild symptoms to severe illness and death. Symptoms typically include fever, cough, and shortness of breath.

How is COVID-19 spread?
Based on what is currently known about COVID-19 and other coronaviruses, spread occurs mostly from person to person via respiratory droplets among close contacts.

Close contact can occur while caring for a patient, including:
- Being within approximately 6 feet (2 meters) of a patient with COVID-19 for a prolonged period of time.
- Having direct contact with infectious secretions from a patient with COVID-19. Infectious secretions may include sputum, serum, blood, and respiratory droplets.

Healthcare personnel may be at risk of infection if close contact occurs while not wearing all recommended personal protective equipment (PPE). Wearing appropriate PPE correctly during patient care prevents transmission.

How is COVID-19 infection prevented or treated?
Currently, there is no vaccine to prevent infection with this virus, and there is no specific antiviral treatment recommended once infected. The best way to prevent infection is to avoid being exposed to this virus.
How should long term care facilities prepare for the potential of COVID-19 in their facilities?

- Continue to monitor information from public health. See key websites at the end of this document.
- Review, update, and implement emergency operations plans.
- Screen new admissions for symptoms of fever, cough, and shortness of breath and implement appropriate infection prevention practices for incoming symptomatic residents.
- Ensure employees clean their hands according to CDC guidelines, including before and after contact with residents, after contact with contaminated surfaces or equipment, and after removing PPE.
  o Put alcohol-based hand rub in every resident room (ideally both inside and outside of the room)
  o Make sure any sink is well-stocked with soap and paper towels for hand washing
- Actively encourage sick employees and visitors to stay home and emphasize respiratory etiquette and frequent hand hygiene by all:
  o CDC stay home when sick posters
  o CDC Handwashing posters
  o NH DPHS posters (at bottom of page)
- Identify where any residents with confirmed or suspect COVID-19 can safely reside apart. This should be a single room with access to private bathroom. If multiple patients become ill, cohorting ill patients together is an option.
- Perform routine and frequent environmental cleaning, especially of commonly touched surfaces.
- Create communications plans, including strategies for sharing information with staff, volunteers, residents, and their families. Consider proactive communications now. See examples at the end of this document.
- Prepare for possible increased numbers of employee absences. Identify essential functions, essential jobs or roles, and critical elements to maintain facility operations if absences are high. See CDC guidance for businesses for additional resources around planning for business continuity.
- Plan to minimize exposure between people if public health officials call for social distancing (e.g., consider minimizing social events and visitors, etc.)
- Assess inventory and ensure supply of PPE recommended for care of patients with COVID-19.
  o Review CDC Interim Infection Prevention and Control Recommendations for Patients with Confirmed Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) or Persons Under Investigation for COVID-19 in Healthcare Settings:
  o Review CDC Healthcare Supply of Personal Protective Equipment:

What preventive measures can employees, volunteers, residents and visitors take to help reduce the spread of respiratory viruses?

- Employees, volunteers, and visitors should stay home until they have been fever-free for at least 24 hours without taking any fever-reducing medication and are feeling better.
- Residents with respiratory illness should stay in their own room until symptoms resolve, including restricting them from common activities, and have their meals served in their room when possible.
- Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue or sleeve. Following use, dispose of tissues into trash and wash hands or use alcohol based hand sanitizer.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
- Wash hands often for at least 20 seconds, especially after coughing or sneezing. Use alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces and objects.
- Encourage/recommend the annual influenza vaccine.
What steps should healthcare workers take when caring for people who may be suspected to have COVID-19?
Healthcare personnel caring for patients with confirmed or possible COVID-19 should adhere to CDC recommendations for infection prevention and control (IPC):

- Assess residents with acute respiratory symptoms and risk factors for COVID-19.
- Restrict residents with COVID-19 symptoms to their room. If they must leave the room for medically necessary procedures, have them wear a facemask.
- Use Standard Precautions, Contact Precautions, and Airborne Precautions and eye protection when caring for patients with confirmed or possible COVID-19.
  - Post signs on the door or wall outside of the resident room that clearly describe the type of precautions needed and required PPE.
  - Make PPE, including facemasks, eye protection, gowns, and gloves, available immediately outside of the resident room.
  - Position a trash can near the exit inside any resident room to make it easy for employees to discard PPE.
- Perform hand hygiene with alcohol-based hand rub before and after all patient contact, contact with potentially infectious material, and before putting on and upon removal of PPE, including gloves. Use soap and water if hands are visibly soiled.
- Practice how to properly don, use, and doff PPE in a manner to prevent self-contamination.
- Perform aerosol-generating procedures, including collection of diagnostic respiratory specimens, in an AIIR, while following appropriate IPC practices, including use of appropriate PPE.
- If the individual requires immediate medical care, call 911 for an ambulance and inform emergency medical services about the suspicion of COVID-19.
- Notify facilities prior to transferring a resident with an acute respiratory illness, including suspected or confirmed COVID-19, to a higher level of care.
- Call NH DPHS at 603-271-4496 (after-hours 603-271-5300) to report suspected cases and for additional guidance.

There is the potential for COVID-19 transmission to occur within a LTCF resulting in an outbreak. Similar approaches to managing outbreaks of influenza within LTCF will be used to manage any outbreak of COVID-19 that occur in a LTCF. It is critical that any increases in respiratory illness, clusters, or outbreaks are reported immediately to NH DPHS at 603-271-4496 (after-hours 603-271-5300) so that we can work together to implement control measures. Key strategies to control respiratory disease outbreaks in LTCF include restricting movement of residents and staff, restricting admissions, notification and restriction of visitors, and limiting group dining and social events.

See CDC Influenza Guidance: Outbreak Management in Long-Term Care Facilities
https://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/infectioncontrol/ltc-facility-guidance.htm

What precautions should be taken for employees who have already traveled internationally?
Employees, volunteers, residents and visitors who have returned from mainland China are being monitored by public health authorities and must stay home for 14 days after their arrival. They should not visit your facility during this time period.

Employees and volunteers who have returned from other locations with travel notices for COVID-19 may continue to attend work. At the beginning of each shift for the 14 days after their return, they should have their health status assessed by occupational health or their supervisor to ensure they do not have a fever and are not
experiencing symptoms of a respiratory illness. They should be counseled that if symptoms develop (e.g. fever, cough, or shortness of breath), they should:

- Seek medical care. Before going to a doctor’s office or emergency room, the individual should call ahead and tell the provider or office about recent travel and symptoms.
- Stay home and away from close contact with others.
- Practice strict respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene including covering the nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing and washing hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.

Given the widespread community transmission identified in some countries outside China (e.g. South Korea and Italy), some healthcare facilities are electing to exclude employees who have traveled to countries with level 3 travel notices for 14 days. This may be appropriate before COVID-19 becomes more widespread as long as it does not disrupt healthcare delivery.

What precautions should be taken for employees who are considering international travel?

Travel notices are based on assessment of the potential health risks involved with traveling to a certain area. A list of destinations with travel notices is available at: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html.

Warning Level 3: CDC recommends travelers including employees of LTCFs avoid all nonessential travel to destinations with level 3 travel notices because of the risk of getting COVID-19.

Alert Level 2: Because COVID-19 can be more serious in older adults and those with chronic medical conditions, people in these groups should talk to a healthcare provider and consider postponing travel to destinations with level 2 travel notices. Given the rapidly evolving outbreak and frequently changing travel advisories, healthcare providers should also consider postponing any travel to countries with a Level 2 travel advisory in order to protect their patients and avoid disruption to the healthcare workforce in case of a change in recommendation or illness. Healthcare institutions may also request that their employees forego elective travel to locations with level 2 travel alerts or potentially face exclusion from work for 14 days.

Watch Level 1: CDC does not recommend canceling or postponing travel to destinations with level 1 travel notices because the risk of COVID-19 is thought to be low.

You should advise your community:

*If you travel, take the following routine precautions:*

- Avoid contact with sick people.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.
- Clean your hands often by washing them with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains 60%–95% alcohol. Soap and water should be used if hands are visibly dirty. It is especially important to clean hands after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after coughing, sneezing or blowing your nose.

*If you travel to a location with any level of travel advisory for COVID-19, when you return, you should remain alert for fever or respiratory symptoms (e.g., cough, shortness of breath). An informational handout on self-observation is available online and can be provided to travelers.*
What cleaning procedures should be followed?
Facilities should routinely clean all frequently touched surfaces such as carts, countertops, and doorknobs. No additional disinfection beyond routine cleaning is recommended at this time. Use the cleaning agents that are usually used in these areas and follow the directions on the label. Provide disposable wipes so that commonly used surfaces (for example, doorknobs, keyboards, remote controls, desks) can be wiped down by employees, residents and visitors before each use. Management of laundry, food service utensils, and medical waste should also be performed in accordance with routine procedures.

What will happen if a person in our facility is diagnosed with COVID-19?
If a person in your facility is diagnosed with COVID-19, NH DPHS will work with your facility to identify close contacts of the person diagnosed and to coordinate messaging to your facility community. NH DPHS will make recommendations for monitoring of close contacts, which will depend on the epidemiology of COVID-19 in the state at that time.

When to Contact Occupational Health Services
If you have an unprotected exposure (i.e., not wearing recommended PPE) to a confirmed or possible COVID-19 patient, contact your supervisor or occupational health immediately.
For more information for healthcare personnel, visit: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/index.html

Where can I go for the most up-to-date information about the COVID-19 outbreak?
Outbreaks involving COVID-19 evolve quickly and recommendations from public health officials may change as new information becomes available. Please check the following websites often for updated information:
Sample Letter for LTCF to Visitors with General Prevention Information

Dear Visitors,

We are writing to provide you an update about Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). There have been no cases of COVID-19 yet identified in New Hampshire; however, it is important for all of us to make sure we are taking precautions to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 and other respiratory illnesses, such as the flu, which we frequently see this time of year.

COVID-19 and many other common respiratory viruses spread through contact with an infected person’s respiratory droplets, such as when a person coughs or sneezes. To prevent the spread of respiratory viruses, the CDC recommends that individuals engage in everyday preventive measures to help stop the spread of germs and avoid illness, such as:

- Wash hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use alcohol-based hand sanitizers.
- Avoid touching eyes, mouth and nose with unwashed hands.
- Do not to share personal items such as water bottles, smokes and/or vapes.
- Avoid close contact with individuals who are sick.
- Stay home when you are sick. The CDC recommends that individuals remain home for at least 24 hours after you no longer have a fever or signs of a fever (i.e., chills, feeling warm, flushed appearance).
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then immediately discard the tissue in the trash.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.

Given the susceptibility of our residents, we are taking measures to ensure staff do not come to work ill. **We also ask that you not visit the facility if you are experiencing fever or any symptoms of respiratory illness.** It is especially important for you to assess your health status and take your temperature prior to visiting if you have traveled to any country for which CDC has issued a travel advisory for COVID-19.

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Sincerely,

[Facility administrator’s name and signature]
Sample Letter for LTCF to Staff with General Prevention Information

Dear Staff,

We are writing to provide you an update about Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). There have been no cases of COVID-19 yet identified in New Hampshire; however, it is important for all of us to make sure we are taking precautions to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 and other respiratory illnesses, such as the flu, which we frequently see this time of year.

COVID-19 and many other common respiratory viruses spread through contact with an infected person’s respiratory droplets, such as when a person coughs or sneezes. To prevent the spread of respiratory viruses, the CDC recommends that individuals engage in everyday preventive measures to help stop the spread of germs and avoid illness, such as:

- Wash hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use alcohol-based hand sanitizers.
- Avoid touching eyes, mouth and nose with unwashed hands.
- Do not to share personal items such as water bottles, smokes and/or vapes.
- Avoid close contact with individuals who are sick.
- Stay home when you are sick. The CDC recommends that individuals remain home for at least 24 hours after you no longer have a fever or signs of a fever (i.e., chills, feeling warm, flushed appearance).
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then immediately discard the tissue in the trash.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.

In addition to these personal prevention measures, our facility staff, volunteers, residents and visitors should avoid all travel to any locations for which CDC has issued a Level 3 travel notice: [https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/notices](https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/notices). Travel to other countries outside of the U.S. should be discussed with a person’s healthcare provider.

According to the health department, people who have returned from mainland China are being monitored by public health authorities and must stay home for 14 days after their travel. People who have returned from other locations with travel notices for COVID-19 may continue to work; however, it is critical that returning travelers check their temperature and assess for symptoms before starting every shift during this 14-day period. Travelers that develop symptoms (e.g., fever, cough, or shortness of breath), should:

- Take their temperature with a thermometer.
- Stay home and avoid close contact with other people.
- Seek health advice by phone from either a healthcare provider or the NH Division of Public Health Services at 603-271-4496 (after-hours: 603-271-5300).
- Before going to a doctor’s office or emergency room, call ahead and tell the provider or office about recent travel and symptoms.
- Practice strict respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene including covering the nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing and washing hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.
- If available, wear a surgical mask when traveling outside of the home (e.g. to a doctor’s office)


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Sincerely,

[Facility administrator’s name and signature]