

**Coronavirus (COVID-19) Guidance for Skilled Nursing and Assisted Living Facilities  
March 4, 2020**

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is spreading globally with instances of COVID-19 community spread in the United States. The general strategies CDC recommends to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in healthcare are the same strategies these facilities use every day to detect and prevent the spread of other respiratory viruses like influenza.

**Symptoms** of respiratory infection, including COVID-19: fever, cough, sore throat, shortness of breath. CDC believes at this time that symptoms may appear in as few as 2 days or as long as 14 days after exposure to the virus.

Healthcare facilities concerned that a resident, visitor, or employee may be a COVID-2019 patient under investigation should contact their local or state health department immediately for consultation and guidance.

**Prepare** your facility. Review and update your infection prevention and control plans and your emergency communication plan.

**Prevent** the introduction of respiratory germs INTO your facility:

- Post signs at the entrance instructing visitors not to visit if they have symptoms of respiratory infection.
- Consider limiting contractors and visitors, including family members, if appropriate. Family can visit by using Skype or calling, texting or checking in on social media.
- Ensure sick leave policies allow employees to stay home if they have symptoms of respiratory infection.
- Assess residents' symptoms of respiratory infection upon admission to the facility and implement appropriate infection prevention practices for incoming symptomatic residents.
- Follow the same basic procedures used during flu season: handwashing, using alcohol-based hand sanitizers and covering coughs.
- Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- If soap and water are not available, use alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.

**Communication** with staff and residents:

- Prepare your staff. Reinforce that anyone who is sick should stay home.
- Keep residents, families and employees informed and updated.
- Question if recent travel to impacted areas.
- Describe actions the facility is taking to protect them, including answering questions and explaining what they can do to protect themselves and their fellow residents.

**Strategies** to Prevent the Spread of COVID-19 in Healthcare Facilities

- Make alcohol-based hand sanitizers available in key locations.

- Make sure tissues are available and any sink is well-stocked with soap and paper towels for hand washing.
- Identify dedicated employees to care for COVID-19 cohort patients and provide infection control training.
  - Refer to CDC guidance on implementing recommended infection prevention practices.
- **Monitor** residents and employees for fever or respiratory symptoms.
  - Restrict residents with fever or acute respiratory symptoms to their room. If they must leave the room for medically necessary procedures, have them wear a facemask (if tolerated).
  - In general, for care of residents with undiagnosed respiratory infection use Standard, Contact, and Droplet Precautions with eye protection unless suspected diagnosis requires Airborne Precautions (e.g., tuberculosis).

## Supplies

Shortages of PPE supplies may occur. The NYS Department of Health (DOH) asks all facilities to compare their existing inventories of PPE, such as face shields, gowns, gloves, masks, N95 respirators, against the expected rate of use of these items under a surge situation, to determine the quantities needed to be on hand. Review the following steps:

- Conduct, secure and monitor the inventory of supplies currently onsite.
- Use existing vendor agreements and procurement plans to place orders for quantities needed by type and size of PPE.
- Activate existing Mutual Aid Agreements to obtain available support from partners.
- Notify County Office of Emergency Management (OEM) when all existing agreements are exhausted and supply needs exceed those available from these sources.  
<http://www.dhSES.ny.gov/oem/contact/map.cfm>
- Coordinate with County OEM to identify and utilize other existing county resources.
- Notify the respective DOH Regional Office of ongoing need.
- If all local resources have been exhausted, submit a request, via your County OEM, to the NYS OEM. The request should include as much detail as available, but include at a minimum the following elements:
  - Type and Quantity of PPE by size
  - Point of Contact at the requesting facility or system
  - Delivery location
  - Date request is needed to be filled by
  - Record of pending orders

Please note that in order to assure adequate time to process and fill a request (as resources are available), a request should be submitted via your County OEM **no later than 10 days before an item is out of stock at the requesting facility.**

## Recommendations for Reporting, Testing, and Specimen Collection

Healthcare facilities should immediately implement recommended infection prevention and control practices if a patient is suspected of having COVID-19. They should notify their state or local health department if a patient is classified as COVID-19. Refer to CDC website for testing and specimen collection requirements.

## Resources

- CDC has information online specifically for long-term care providers:  
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/healthcare-facilities/prevent-spread-in-long-term-care-facilities.html>

- Refer to the AHCA/NCAL website for the latest information for long-term care providers:  
[https://www.ahcancal.org/facility\\_operations/disaster\\_planning/Pages/Coronavirus.aspx](https://www.ahcancal.org/facility_operations/disaster_planning/Pages/Coronavirus.aspx)
- NYSHFA/NYSCAL: <https://www.nyshfa-nyscal.org/>
- COVID-19 Healthcare Planning Checklist:  
<https://www.phe.gov/Preparedness/COVID19/Documents/COVID-19%20Healthcare%20Planning%20Checklist.pdf>

### **Common Media Q&A**

- **Should families who are worried move their loved ones out of skilled nursing centers or assisted living communities?**
  - No. Moving the elderly or frail from a center is risky and often has long-lasting impacts. Research around natural disasters and other emergency events has proven this over time. CDC does not currently recommend transferring residents either home or to the hospital.
- **How concerned are you for skilled nursing center or assisted living residents?**
  - Just like the flu, we know that the frail and elderly are especially susceptible to this virus. That's why we are in close communication with CDC and CMS to ensure we have the latest information and resources available.
- **Are you having trouble getting things like masks and gowns?**
  - Long-term care providers are having some of the same difficulties as other health care providers getting masks and gowns. Providers should contact their **County Office of Emergency Management (OEM) local health department and Regional Office of DOH if unable to place** orders for equipment they need. It's important to note that CDC does not recommend masks for the general public at this point.

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