

Wolf Administration Continues Support for Residents and Staff at Long-Term Care Facilities, Mitigates the Spread of COVID-19 through Testing, Education and Resources

Harrisburg, PA – Secretary of Health Dr. Rachel Levine and Secretary of Human Services Teresa Miller today emphasized the work being done through testing, education and resources to assist long-term care facilities (LTCFs) in mitigating the spread of COVID-19 to protect residents and staff living and working in these congregate care facilities.

The secretaries also announced an expanded [testing order](#) for LTCFs, extending to personal care homes, assisted living residences, and intermediate care facilities licensed by the Department of Human Services.

“We continue to take necessary action to protect our most vulnerable Pennsylvanians – many of whom reside in long-term care facilities,” Secretary of Health Dr. Rachel Levine said. “Testing, education and resources are essential components to ensure the safety and well-being of residents. Our strides to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in the commonwealth have been successful, but we continue to strengthen these efforts as COVID-19 remains a threat in our communities.”

The Wolf Administration’s [strategy to protect residents of LTCFs](#) focuses on ensuring resident safety through education, resources and testing; preventing and mitigating outbreaks; and working in partnership with other state agencies, municipal and county health departments and LTCFs.

As of June 19, the departments of Health and Human Services have deployed [these mitigation efforts](#) and engaged with facility management and local health systems to further stop the spread of COVID-19 and best protect residents and staff of all LTCFs:

- Distributed over 2,300 shipments of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to date, which includes 306,944 gowns, 336,559 face shields, 1,023,800 gloves, 2,807,570 N95s masks and 1,175,200 surgical masks.
- Deployed 69 Pennsylvania National Guard Strike Teams to 34 different LTCFs. Work includes 32 site assessments, 10 PPE trainings, 13 COVID-19 mass testing missions, and 14 facility staffing missions.
- Responded to 100 percent of outbreaks, defined as one or more confirmed positive case among staff or residents, in LTCFs.
- Provided advice and consultation on infection control and outbreak response to facilities and, where needed;
- Collaborated, partnered and received reports from local, state, and federal resources, along with contracted support from ECRI.

Through the collaborations and partnerships with ECRI and Patient Safety Authority (PSA), the department provided infection control and technical assistance to over 100

and 90 different LTCFs, respectively. The US Public Health Service has also been deployed to 19 LTCFs for onsite assessments and training.

Additionally, the Educational Support and Clinical Consultation Program (ESCCP) team, a partnership between DHS, the Jewish Healthcare Foundation, and seven health systems around Pennsylvania, have provided clinical guidance, advice on infection control strategies, and clinical needs identification to a more than 900 long-term care facilities licensed by DHS and 250 skilled nursing facilities licensed by DOH. The ESCCP program has conducted more than 16 webinars to more than 2,400 participants statewide on topics like proper use of PPE, infection prevention and control methods, emotional support for residents, and facilitating safe communication between residents and outside family and friends and providing safe entertainment and programming while restrictions are in place. In July, the ESCCP program will transition from a voluntary partnership to a contracted grant agreement that establishes Regional Response Healthcare Collaboratives and will provide financial support to contracted health system partners to assist with continued education, clinical support, testing, and other areas necessary to respond to COVID-19.

The Wolf Administration is committed to testing all residents and staff in Pennsylvania's long-term care facilities as part of the statewide comprehensive [testing strategy](#). On June 8, the Department of Health issued an [Order](#) to require nursing homes to complete baseline universal testing no later than July 24. Since then, testing across all LTCFs over the last four weeks has increased 30 percent as compared to the month before. The test positivity rate within all LTCFs is the lowest it has been since the start of the outbreak: 7.8 percent. Now, over 100 facilities have now reported completion of universal testing.

The Department of Health today issued a [testing order](#) extending universal testing requirements to DHS' licensed assisted living residences, personal care homes, and intermediate care facilities effective July 1, 2020. Under this order, these licensed facilities are directed to test residents and staff at least once before August 31, 2020. Facilities included under this order were already following previously issued testing guidance and many have ramped up testing but were not included in the original order due to differences in how these facilities would cohort patients and due to DHS' facilities not always having medical directors or on-site clinical staff. Instituting this requirement in July allows the Regional Response Health Collaboratives, which will be in place in early July, to provide testing and clinical support to these facilities as they ramp up testing and prepare for a potential second spike of cases in Pennsylvania.

“Our long-term care facilities serve medically fragile and vulnerable Pennsylvanians, and we must be extremely vigilant to prevent COVID-19 from reaching these facilities,” said Secretary Miller. “Even as circumstances improve around the commonwealth, the risk is still acute for residents and staff of these facilities. We cannot let our guard down,

and we are committed to supporting these facilities as they adjust to evolving circumstances.”

Education to facilities has been provided through bulletin boards, nursing home associations, and our normal channels of communication such as [Health Alert Network](#) messages. That education has included [guidance](#) for clinicians at long-term care facilities on the [cohorting](#) of residents with COVID-19 in dedicated units within LTCFs, effective transmission prevention strategy, universal screening and masking of all healthcare workers, and how to provide access to the state’s [Long-Term Care Ombudsman](#).

The [long term care facility data](#) mandated by the Department of Health includes the number of cases, number of employee cases and number of deaths that have occurred at each facility. Facilities who are not reporting, or not reporting properly, have been assisted to ensure the data is being shared properly. As testing becomes more widespread, it is important that all facilities report all necessary information.

For facilities with less than five in any of the collected data points, the information is redacted to protect patient confidentiality at that facility. If a facility does not have any COVID-19 cases or deaths, it will still be shown on the spreadsheet.

Individuals with complaints about a nursing home can file that complaint with the Department of Health in several ways. Complaints can be made anonymously by calling 1-800-254-5164, filling out the [online complaint form](#), emailing c-ncomplai@pa.gov or sending the complaint [in the mail](#) to the department. Complaints regarding personal care homes and assisted living residences can be sent to DHS at RA-pwarlheadquarters@pa.gov.

The Wolf Administration stresses the role Pennsylvanians play in helping to reduce the spread of COVID-19:

- Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.
- Cover any coughs or sneezes with your elbow, not your hands.
- Clean surfaces frequently.
- Stay home to avoid spreading COVID-19, especially if you are unwell.
- If you must go out for a life-sustaining reason, please wear a mask.

All Pennsylvania residents are encouraged to sign up for AlertPA, a text notification system for health, weather, and other important alerts like COVID-19 updates from commonwealth agencies. Residents can sign up online at www.ready.pa.gov/BeInformed/Signup-For-Alerts.