



## **COVID-19 Notification Guidance**

*Recommendation and best practices for notifying residents and families of confirmed COVID-19 cases and death related to the virus in nursing homes and housing with services/assisted living.*

### **BACKGROUND**

The Long-Term Care Imperative, which is composed of Care Providers of Minnesota and LeadingAge Minnesota, recommends all senior care providers in Minnesota provide frequent and transparent communications with residents, resident representatives, families and staff to inform them of the impact of COVID-19 in their facilities. The COVID-19 pandemic is a unique public health crisis and sharing accurate information as quickly as possible is helping our care communities, the media and the public better understand the challenges of senior care and the need for better testing, treatment and protective equipment in care settings.

The guidance and best practices below build upon the recommended practices each Association has advised since late March and is consistent with an interim final rule released by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services on April 30. While the CMS rule is applicable only to nursing homes, we recommend that housing with services/assisted living settings follow the same practices.

### **GUIDANCE**

Nursing homes and assisted living settings should notify residents, resident representatives, families and staff when they have a pending (ie: someone who is being tested) or confirmed case of COVID-19 in their facility impacting resident and/or staff. This notification should also occur if there is evidence that a third party may have exposed residents or staff to coronavirus.

Nursing homes and assisted living should distribute regular communication providing the current status of COVID-19 in their settings, including total number of pending cases, confirmed cases and deaths related to the virus. CMS does not require reporting of deaths to residents, their representatives and families, but nursing homes will be required to report deaths to the CDC under the new CMS rule. We recommend that senior care providers in all settings referenced above be open and transparent in sharing this information with residents, their representatives, families and staff in order.

This communication, as appropriate, can also include the total tests provided, the number of those no longer are positive, and other measurements that demonstrate prevention and mitigation. This guidance can be followed in a way that provides important information without violating HIPAA rules or other privacy laws.

Specifically, we recommend that senior care communities:

- Inform your residents, as well as their representatives, families and staff by 5 p.m. the next calendar day following the occurrence of:
  - Either a single confirmed infection of COVID-19, or
  - Three or more residents or staff with new onset of respiratory symptoms occurring within 72 hours of each other.
- This information must:
  - Include information on mitigating actions implemented to prevent or reduce the risk of transmission, including if normal operations of the facility will be altered; and
  - Include any cumulative updates for residents, their representatives, and families at least weekly or by 5 p.m. the next calendar day following the subsequent occurrence of either:
    - Each time a confirmed infection of COVID-19 is identified, or
    - Whenever three or more residents or staff with new onset of respiratory symptoms occur within 72 hours of each other.
  - Not include personally identifiable information;
- Use general communication platforms easily available to residents, representatives and families such as paper notifications, listservs, website postings, and recorded telephone messages.

#### **RECOMMENDED BEST PRACTICES**

- Provide regular updates to all residents, resident representatives and staff on the status of COVID-19 in your setting, which include the total number of pending tests, confirmed cases and deaths related to the virus.
- Notification examples include but are not limited to.
  - Create a COVID-19 hotline that you update at a designated time each day with information on your operations, the number of confirmed cases and deaths. Broadly communicate this hotline number and post it to your COVID-19 webpage.
  - Create a COVID-19 status report on your website that is regularly updated. Broadly communicate the availability of this status report and send an email message when the status report is updated providing a link to it.
  - Distribute an email message to all residents and families within 24 hours of receiving notification of a confirmed case per the CMS guidance and/or whenever three or more residents or staff with new onset of respiratory symptoms occur within 72 hours of each other.
  - Distribute a mass notification via text message to residents, families and staff when you have posted an update to your hotline or webpage.
- Designate a member of your staff team to serve as a designated point of contact for residents, their representatives and families. Make sure that an initial response is provided to all inquiries as soon as possible.
- If you receive an inquiry from the media, you must protect personally identifiable information, and should confirm the data on suspected and confirmed cases, as well as the protocol for prevention and mitigation currently being used within your facility.