



Visit our COVID-19 Page
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Dear Member:

Summary of Today's CDC Call for Medical Directors/Clinicians

Maine CDC Update from Dr. Siiri Bennett

- Cumulative COVID Cases: 10,800
- 189 total deaths
- 259 cases identified yesterday, with 29 of those cases being associated with outbreaks
- 107 total outbreaks have been identified throughout Maine including 2 hospitals, and approximately 17 LTC/Rehab homes
- There have been 12 deaths in the last 24 hrs with 7 identified in LTC facilities
- The statewide positivity rate is currently 2.62% and testing capacity holds around 727/100k
- There are currently 105 hospitalizations, with 43 individuals in ICU, and 9 people on ventilators

Recommendations from Maine CDC to LTC facilities

- Take a look on the MEHCA.com/COVID webpage under DHHS links for the Maine CDC checklist and self-assessment tool.
- Celebrate the successes: when your facility is COVID free-acknowledge the hard work that it takes to maintain that level of vigilance.
- Reassure staff that we need to hold strong, there are rumors of vaccination being 'on the ground floor' by late December.
- CDC has updated the ICAR assessment for long term care facilities.

Maine DHHS/DLC/OADS

- Federal CMS has released recommendations for holidays and for residents/families that request visitation outside the facility
- OADS is continuing to offer consultation from the three agencies offering infection control consults. This program ends by late December. Please submit your requests for consultation to Gretchen Zeh-Higgins, Long-Term Care Facility Supervisor for the Office of Aging and Disability Services at (207) 287-8823 or at gretchen.zeh-higgins@maine.gov. Please title the subject line of the email "IP&C Consultation."
- Review of Infection control practices, perform onsite ICAR assessments and identify areas of gaps and will roll it into an infection prevention plan. The consultants will also train for the conducting of an ICAR facility assessment in the future.
- For new employees or students etc. facilities should follow the testing frequency plans identified by the county transmission rates that are updated weekly.
- We do anticipate another guidance document regarding the financial reimbursement of surveillance testing which will include the process for submitting remittance etc.

Update on Vaccinations: CDC does anticipate good immunity from the vaccines being created. They will most likely require a series of two shots spaced out 20-24 days apart. With regard to the current trials we are not seeing the trial studies but rather, the news reports. We should be cautious in reading into the information the news is providing before we have the actual report from the manufacturers. We are also aware that there was a concerted effort to increase the number of older adults in the trials. The vaccines will not be a magic button. We will continue to need to be vigilant regarding infection control and prevention. We don't anticipate seeing large quantities of the vaccine until the middle of the first quarter 2021.

Mitigating Outbreaks: One facility reports that they have implemented the policy that residents wear masks when out of their rooms and staff are wearing masks with face shields throughout their shifts. This has continued to result in 100% negative COVID testing.

Holiday Visits: Even though we are in a public health emergency, individuals still have the right to make their own decisions. We should educate residents and families of the risk and plan for the return of that person. CMS has provided guidance on this. See article below for guidance and sample communication. Facilities should be thinking about 'what if' they had a person under investigation in the building. We should have a plan for quarantining etc. for residents who leave and return to the facility.

Abbott Testing Supplies: Maine DHHS is looking into the disbursement of these supplies. MHCA has applied to be a distribution center for members, but we have no additional details at this time. If you have a specific question, please reach out to Sally Weiss at sally.weiss@maine.gov

AHCA and CMS Produce Staff Video: Staying Safe During the Holiday Season

In a new video for frontline long term care workers, AHCA/NCAL's chief medical officer Dr. David Gifford is joined by Dr. Shari Ling, Deputy Medical Director at the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). The two chat about ways staff members can help keep their residents, colleagues, family members and themselves safe during the holiday season by discussing some myths we've heard and offering the facts. Watch it here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DX_EPNk3wqM&feature=emb_logo

Dr. Ling and Dr. Gifford help explain why it's important to isolate for 14 days if you've been exposed to someone with COVID-19 (and why a negative test can be a false assurance). They also emphasize the importance of following CDC guidelines while out in the community. This includes avoiding large family gatherings and wearing a mask when out in public. The two geriatricians also remind staff to wear masks in all parts of the long term care facility, not just around residents. And they encourage staff members to support and remind one another should they see a colleague not wearing PPE appropriately.

Share this video with your staff and colleagues, so we can all do our part to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and keep our residents and family members safe during the holidays.

State and Federal Guidance on Frequency of NF Testing

Back on October 9th, 2020 the Maine Division of Licensing released guidance for all LTC and ICF/IID facilities in Maine to comply with the Federal CMS guidance within QSO-20-39. In this State memo the Division of Licensing stated that all federal nursing home guidance should be followed except in regard to the QSO's positivity rate metrics, which Maine DHHS is replacing with new case rate metrics. According to the October 9th guidance, in Maine, the county risk level (low, moderate, or high) will be based on 28-day average County Transmission rates (new cases/10,000 resident population in the county), which will be updated every 14 days and reported on the Maine CDC's website. Facilities should check the update for new case rates every two weeks, which began October 8, 2020. MHCA has also added a copy of the county transmission rates to our COVID webpage. The risk level of a county will be based on the transmission rates in the table below.

Table 1. County Transmission Rate Thresholds County New Case Rate in the Last 28 Days (Updated Every 14 Days)

Low: Less than 8/10,000
Moderate: 8/10,000 to less than 16/10,000
High: 16/10,000 or higher

Some members have inquired on which testing frequency requirement we should be following now that our positivity rates are increasing. According to William Montejo, Director of Licensing for Maine DHHS, providers should follow the State of Maine testing frequency based on the [transmission rates put forth by the Maine CDC](#) which can be found here. According to Bill and Maine DHHS providers "WILL NOT be out of compliance with Federal standards by following the Maine testing guidance."

CMS Releases Alert Regarding Holidays and Visitation; AHCA Provides Template Letter

On November 18 CMS released an [alert](#) regarding holiday visitation. During the holidays, facilities, residents, and visitors should continue to follow the [guidelines for visitation](#) and adhere to the core principles of infection prevention, such as remaining six feet or more apart, wearing a face covering at all times, and limiting the number of visitors in the nursing home at any one time. Families, residents, and providers need to work together to take precautions during the holidays to help reduce the risk of spread while supporting family and resident engagement as much as possible using these core infection prevention practices. CMS recommends against residents leaving the nursing home during the public health emergency because it increases the resident's risk for exposure to COVID-19. The risk may be further increased by factors such as a resident's health status, the spread of COVID-19 in the community (e.g., cases or positivity rate), or attendance at large gatherings.

CMS states that nursing homes should educate residents and families of the risks of leaving the facility, the steps they should take to reduce the risk of contracting COVID19 and encourage residents to stay connected with loved ones through alternative means of communication. It is important to urge families to notify the facility if they suspect the resident has been exposed to COVID-19 while outside the nursing home. Families, residents, and staff should also refer to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) [webpage on holiday celebrations](#). Read the full CMS [alert](#).

AHCA/NCAL has drafted a template letter to families regarding holiday outings which members may customize as needed. You can find the letter [here](#).

Federal CDC Updates Testing and Management Considerations and Reinfection Criteria

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released updates to testing and management considerations for nursing home residents with acute respiratory illness symptoms when COVID-19 and influenza viruses are co-circulating. The CDC says that the following practices should be considered when both COVID-19 and influenza viruses are found in the community based upon local health surveillance data and testing at local healthcare facilities. The considerations are specific to nursing home resident care but could be adapted for use in other long-term care settings including assisted living facilities.

The CDC released criteria on COVID-19 cases that should be assessed for suspected reinfection. The criteria outlines standards that laboratory testing should meet when evaluating specimens for reinfection. The CDC issued a protocol intended to provide state/local health departments with standardized framework and toolkit for investigating COVID-19 reinfection suspected cases.

Please visit the new reinfection webpages to learn more:

- [Common Investigation Protocol for Investigating Suspected SARS-CoV-2 Reinfection](#)
- [Investigative Criteria for Suspected Cases of SARS-CoV-2 Reinfection \(ICR\)](#)
 - [Reinfection with COVID-19 \(consumer website companion\)](#)

CMS Targeted COVID-19 Training for Front Line Staff

The CMS Targeted COVID-19 Training for Frontline Nursing Home Staff & Management is available now, with five specific modules designed for frontline clinical staff and 10 designed for nursing home management. The training is available on the CMS Quality, Safety & Education Portal at <https://QSEP.cms.gov>. Instructions on how to access the trainings are available at this website.

Nursing Home ECHO Registration Deadline Extended Again

The deadline for nursing home registration into an ECHO program allowing for the home to be eligible for a \$6,000 reimbursement payment has been extended until **November 30th**. Centers in all states can find [more information](#) on this free program and register [here](#). Last week, MHCA learned that there are several empty seats in the RI ECHO program being sponsored by HealthCentric Advisors. As you know, this program runs for 16 weeks, is led by nursing home experts and participants receive a stipend if they participate in 13 of the 16 sessions. Please see [attached flyer](#) if you are interested and disregard the sign up date. For more information, please contact: Joshua Clodius at jclodius@healthcentricadvisors.org.

Thank you for all you do to care for your residents and staff.

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