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Dear Member:

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 COVID-19 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](#).

Maine DHHS Announces New Financial Support For NF Staff Testing After Suspending State Lab Utilization

As you know, Maine suspended the use of HETL for nursing facility staff surveillance testing effective November 2, 2020 due to increased overall COVID-19 case numbers in Maine and the corresponding volume pressure placed on the State lab. DHHS announced yesterday that it will now provide additional financial support to nursing facilities for periodic COVID-19 testing of their staff.

Through MaineCare, DHHS will help to reimburse nursing facilities for their MaineCare share of costs to conduct this surveillance testing using commercial laboratories up to \$80 per test. This investment of an estimated \$8 million in State and Federal funds over the coming months will help protect residents and staff from the silent spread of this deadly disease. This reimbursement will be available for periodic staff testing through commercial labs dating back to November 2, 2020 and through the duration of the public health emergency.

In the event of at least one confirmed case of COVID-19 in staff or residents, nursing facilities must immediately conduct universal testing and these samples will continue to be processed at no charge through the State Health and Environmental Testing Laboratory (HETL).

"Providing expanded support for nursing facilities during this surge in COVID-19 in Maine is critical to help the hardworking frontline workers care for themselves and residents of nursing homes," said DHHS Commissioner Jeanne Lambrew.

MHCA has advocated for financial relief for providers to include staff testing expenses and was pleased to see the State's announcement. Additional reimbursement details will be forthcoming from the Office of MaineCare Services. Read the full notice from Commissioner Lambrew [here](#).

According to [CMS data](#), Maine's rates of COVID-19 infections and deaths in nursing facilities are among the lowest in the nation.

CMS is Calling Me – Is This Legit?

Last week, CMS Administrator Seema Verma announced that CMS or state surveyors will be calling nursing homes who report new cases of COVID and/or report shortages of PPE and/or staffing to offer assistance. We believe these calls would be triggered by the data you enter in NHSN. They will ask several questions to see how they can help the facility acquire resources such as staffing, PPE or testing supplies. AHCA has heard that these questions may be similar to:

- Do you have enough PPE in the facility for one week?
- Do you have enough staff in the facility to care for residents in proper cohort sections?
- What percentage of your staff completed the CMS/CDC training online?
- What is the frequency of resident/staff testing currently?
- How did your outbreak occur (staff, residents, visitor, vendor, other)?
- What is the availability of test kits? For all residents/all staff? How long will they last?

If you receive one of these calls, please let AHCA know your experience, including any resulting assistance, by emailing us at [mailto:COVID19@ahca.org?subject= COVID19@ahca.org](mailto:COVID19@ahca.org?subject=COVID19@ahca.org) with a copy to ngrosso@mehca.org.

AHCA/NCAL Updates 3-Day Qualifying Hospital Stay and Benefit Period Waiver Guidance Resources

On November 18, AHCA/NCAL updated the 3-Day Stay and Benefit-Period Waivers for Medicare Part A SNF PPS Fact Sheet [here](#), as well as the accompanying webinar [here](#). These changes from the prior October versions were necessary to account for updated guidance the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) issued since October 16. The CMS updates were related to coverage and claims processing instructions associated with the benefit period waivers. AHCA/NCAL recommends that providers review these updates, particularly staff responsible for coverage and claims processing.

Deadline Tomorrow to Complete AHCA COVID-19 Impact Survey

AHCA/NCAL is asking providers (SNF, AL, ID/DD) to complete a [survey](#) in regard to COVID-19's impact on your facility/company. Providers are asked about several topics, including workforce, personal protective equipment, testing, and finances. Providers may [download a copy of the questionnaire](#), if they wish to gather the necessary information before filling it out online. MHCA encourages members to respond to this survey by **end of the day Friday, November 20**, and it should take 15-20 minutes to complete. The goal is to be able to provide a state breakdown of the results once the survey closes.

Updated MaineCare COVID-19 Billing/Testing Codes

The COVID-19 Billing and Coding Guidance has been updated to reflect that MaineCare has added COVID-19 antigen test code 87426 to all benefits, including the uninsured benefit group. Additionally, per flexibility from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services' (CMS), evaluation and management code 99211 is allowed for both new and established patients for COVID-19 assessment and specimen collection. The related COVID-19 Billing Codes for MaineCare members and uninsured individuals spreadsheet has been updated to reflect these changes.

ConnecttoCare Jobs Portal Available Statewide

Maine DHHS recently announced that all licensed nursing facilities in Maine now have access to Connect to Care Jobs, a portal where facilities can connect with qualified job applicants. DHHS announced a pilot of the portal in September that has now been expanded statewide. Interested job applicants are encouraged to visit ConnecttoCareJobs.com. The portal is offered at no charge to job seekers in partnership with ADvancing States, a national organization of state aging and disability agencies. DHHS expects to expand the portal to additional long-term care settings in the near future.

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

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