



*Celebrating our caregivers' excellence... Thank you for all you do!*

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**Dear Member:**

#### **Notes from Today's Medical Directors Call-03/16/2021**

##### **Update from Maine CDC**

Maine continues to close more outbreaks than open but there have been a few recent outbreaks associated with congregate care settings. Currently Maine has a 1.52% PCR positivity rate, this may have to do with an increase in testing volume. We have 86 individuals hospitalized, 8 on vents, and 26 in ICU.

##### **Update from DHHS OADS**

Maine CDC, DHHS DLC and OADS are working with MHCA to discuss the effort of ongoing vaccination of HCWs in LTC. There will be updated guidance to the Maine table of community engagement activities but that is not available today. The table revisions will include how vaccinations impact the activities permissible by residents, families and our staff in congregate care and we are anticipating this by the end of this week.

Today, Carrie Rice, Maine CDC also provided updates on guidance documents related to the recent revisions of CMS QSO-20-39. As soon as MHCA receives the slides we will upload these to our COVID webpage in the meantime, highlights include:

##### **Travel**

According to the Governor's Order, travelers must get a recent negative COVID-19 test within the last 72 hrs prior to arrival OR quarantine for 10 days EXCEPT from the states of New Hampshire, Vermont, Connecticut, Rhode Island and Massachusetts.

For HCWs: MeCDC recommends that HCW that travel out of state be restricted from work for 14 days if they have visited a non-exempt state regardless of their status/testing. If the facility staffing situation necessitates that they return to work prior to 14 days MeCDC recommends 'enhanced masking' during work for the entire 14 day period. Enhanced masking means not removing your mask in the presence of others....HCW removing a mask to eat/drink should do so a private room or outside, away from others.

##### **New Admissions**

Quarantine is NO LONGER recommended for resident who are being admitted to a facility IF THEY ARE FULLY VACCINATED and have NOT had prolonged close contact with someone with SARS-CoV-2 infection in prior 14 days.

##### **Visitation**

According to CMS, regardless of how visits are conducted, there are certain core principles and best practices that reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission. For instance:

- Screening of all who enter
- Face covering/source control masking
- Social distancing

According to CMS visitors are NOT required to be tested or vaccinated as a condition of visitation. If the RESIDENT IS FULLY VACCINATED they may chose to have close contact with their loved one while wearing a well fitted mask and practicing hand hygiene afterwards.

According to Lynn Hadyniak of ME DHHS Licensing: facilities are able to schedule visits and the length of time for each visit. This is specifically address in the recent revisions to QSO-20-39 NH from March. This information can be found in the Indoor Visitation section addressed on page 3.

##### **Federal CDC**

- Facilities should continue to regularly vaccinate new admissions and HCP.
- Anyone entering the facility should continue to be screened prior to entry.
- Visitors and residents (of tolerated) should continue to wear a well-fitted cloth mask, facemask or respirator.
- Hand Hygiene should be performed by the resident and visitor before and after visiting.
- Facilities should have a plan to manage visitation and visitor flow. Facilities MAY NEED to limit the number of visitors per resident at one time as well as the total number of visitors in the facility at one time in order to maintain infection control precautions.

- Visits for residents who share a room ideally should NOT be conducted in that shared room. If in-room visitation must occur an unvaccinated roommate should NOT be present during the visit. Best practice would be for the facility to maintain infection prevention and social distancing during all visitation.

#### **CMS Outbreak Guidance**

- Compassionate care visits and visits under federal disability law should be allowed at all times.
- When a facility is designated in an outbreak facilities should suspend visitation on the affected unit until discontinuation of outbreak status.
- Visitation can resume following one full round of outbreak testing with NO NEW CASES identified.

#### **HCW Exposure (MeCDC Group A)**

If a HCW meets criteria for work related close contact:

- HCW who are not fully vaccinated should work restrict for 14 days and quarantine at home
- HCW who are fully vaccinated and asymptomatic should consider a 14 day work restriction but this is not required. Facilities should risk assess the potential underlying conditions of the individual in making this decision.

HCW who are within 90 days of testing positive for COVID and have recovered COULD continue to work if asymptomatic and if they monitor symptoms. A facility should still consider work restriction if exposure was high risk.

#### **CMS Releases Graphic for Families to Explain Visitation Options**

On March 10, 2021, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), in collaboration with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), issued updated guidance for nursing homes to safely expand visitation options during the COVID-19 pandemic public health emergency (PHE). Today, CMS is releasing a [graphic](#) to further explain the expanded visitation options. According to the updated guidance, facilities should allow responsible indoor visitation at all times and for all residents, regardless of vaccination status of the resident, or visitor, unless certain scenarios arise that would limit visitation. [Read the full press release](#) and review the graphic in [English](#) and [Spanish](#).

In addition, MHCA in partnership with the Maine LTC Ombudsman Program, will be developing materials for facilities to share with their residents and loved ones. The intent is to assist members in explaining the new expanded visitation with parameters set by CDC and CMS guidance.

#### **CDC Releases Vaccine Safety Monitoring Videos**

The CDC is actively monitoring vaccine safety, and two of their key monitoring systems are the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS) and V-Safe. Staff in long term care facilities are asked to report any concerning side effects in residents through VAERS, while V-Safe is for individuals who receive the vaccine (residents and staff) to self-report their health and any side effects after vaccination via a smartphone app.

The CDC has released new videos to educate staff and residents on both systems. It is strongly encouraged that facilities review these resources and familiarize themselves with these reporting systems:

- Vaccine Safety Monitoring for Long-Term Care Facility and Staff: VAERS – Certified nursing assistants and other caregivers in a long term care facility can learn more about VAERS through [this video](#). Learn what VAERS does and how you can help medical staff report any concerning side effects in residents following COVID-19 vaccination. Learn about common side effects after COVID-19 vaccination and what you need to report to VAERS.
- Vaccine Safety Monitoring for Long-Term Care Facility Staff and Caregivers: V-safe – [This video](#) is for certified nursing assistants and other caregivers in a long term care facility. Learn how to register and get started with V-safe, the CDC's after-vaccination health checker. Use your smartphone to tell the CDC about any side effects after getting the COVID-19 vaccine. You'll also get reminders if you need a second vaccine dose.

#### **CMS Increases Reimbursement Rates for COVID-19 Vaccine Administration**

This week, CMS increased the Medicare payment amount for administering the COVID-19 vaccine. The updated rates policy also impacts Medicaid, Medicare Advantage, and commercial insurance vaccine administration policies. [Read the full press release](#). AHCA/NCAL members that elect to administer and bill for COVID-19 vaccine and not through a third party, such as an LTC pharmacy, should also review the AHCA/NCAL [COVID-19 Vaccine Coverage and Billing Guidance](#).

Sincerely,

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