

April 24, 2020

Dear Long-Term Care Facility Colleagues,

**Re: Heightened Practices Required to Mitigate COVID-19 Outbreaks in Long-Term Care Facilities**

The COVID-19 pandemic is adversely affecting all of us; however, its impact is seen more acutely in our most vulnerable Howard County residents in long-term care facilities (LTCF), specifically Skilled Nursing Facilities (SNF), Subacute Rehabilitation Facilities (SRF), Assisted Living Facilities (ALF), and Congregate Living (CL).

Extra measures must be implemented in LTCF to effectively mitigate the impact of this unprecedented pandemic on our most vulnerable residents:

- **A medical provider must evaluate each patient daily.** The clinical disposition of individuals infected with COVID-19 can change quickly. This is especially true for NH and LTCF residents. Atypical presentation of infection means medical evaluation may be warranted for: lower temperature (<100.0F); muscle aches; nausea; vomiting; diarrhea; abdominal pain; headache; runny nose; or fatigue.
- **Staff must actively assess each resident during every shift.** COVID 19 positive residents should be assessed by the SNF staff each shift. This would include a clinical assessment, including vital signs, lung exam and O2 saturation.
- **Medical providers and staff must practice enhanced vigilance and heightened attention to duty.** The provider should be notified immediately if either acute symptoms or acute hypoxia are present. If the patient is felt to be clinically unstable (i.e. increased work of breathing, hypotension or significant acute hypoxia despite oxygen supplementation) and it is consistent with the patient's wishes, urgent hospitalization is warranted. If the acute symptoms do not clinically warrant a hospital transfer or if transfer is not compatible with the patient's expressed wishes, the medical provider should assess the patient within 24 hours of symptom onset and daily until clinically stable.
- **Symptomatic residents must be tested expeditiously.** It is expected that all symptomatic residents in LTCF are tested for COVID-19 in a timely manner. Residents in LTCF must be tested by facility healthcare providers and/or hired personnel. Commercial laboratories will process samples. Alternatively, Howard County Health Department can offer testing kits for scheduled pick-up to LTCF from the Maryland Department of Health laboratory. Symptomatic staff members must be excluded from working at the facility and can have their

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primary care provider order testing at drive up clinics in the County, as well.

- **Updated CDC recommendations must be implemented:** As of April 13, 2020, additional guidance addresses asymptomatic and pre-symptomatic transmission of COVID-19 infection.
  - Implement universal source control for everyone entering the facility (including health care personnel) and actively screen for fever and other COVID-19 symptoms before every shift
  - Isolate symptomatic patients and cohort COVID-19 confirmed patients
  - Limit the numbers of staff providing COVID-19 patient care

The Maryland Department of Health (MDH) invites all LTCF to participate in their webinar on Thursdays weekly, 12:30-1:30pm, for key CDC updates and MDH public health guidance.

COVID-19 demands that we meet these extraordinary requirements to ensure we promote, preserve, and protect the health of all Howard County residents, especially the most vulnerable of our population. **Your immediate attention is expected and appreciated to ensure above practices within your LTCF.**

Sincerely,



Maura J. Rossman, MD  
Health Officer, Howard County