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## COVID-19 Guidance for Long-Term Care Facilities (LTCFs) – March 9, 2020

Older adults and people who have severe chronic medical conditions like diabetes, hypertension, heart, lung or kidney disease or who are immunosuppressed seem to be at higher risk for more serious COVID-19 illness. Early data suggest older people are twice as likely to have serious COVID-19 illness, including death. This may be because:

- As people age, their immune systems change, making it harder for their body to fight off diseases and infection.
- Many older adults are also more likely to have underlying health conditions that make it harder to cope with and recover from illness.

**Because of the increased vulnerability of residents and staff in Maine's LTCFs to COVID-19 infection, Maine CDC strongly recommends that LTCFs ask all visitors and all staff to check in at one clearing point upon arrival, to confirm that they:**

- **Have no signs or symptoms of respiratory infection such as fever, cough or sore throat**
- **Have not traveled within the last 14 days to restricted countries (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html>)**
- **Have not had any contact with someone with known COVID-19 or a person under investigation for COVID-19**

**If any visitor or staff meets any of the above criteria, LTCFs may restrict their entry to the facility.**

**Start now!** As COVID-19 spreads to the community, Maine CDC may recommend further and stricter measures in the future.

The general strategies recommended by the CDC to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in LTCFs are the same strategies used every day to detect and prevent the spread of other respiratory viruses like influenza.

Other actions LTCFs can take to help prevent the introduction and spread of COVID-19 in the facility include:

### 1. **PREPARE for an outbreak of COVID-19**

- a. Meet with all staff to educate them on COVID-19, appropriate infection control practices, and how to manage patients with respiratory illness, including COVID-19.

- b. Plan to optimize your facility’s supply of personal protective equipment in the event of shortages. Identify flexible mechanisms to procure additional supplies when needed.
- c. Become familiar with infection prevention and control guidance for managing COVID-19 patients.
- d. Have sick leave policies in place that allow employees to stay home if they have symptoms of a respiratory illness.

**2. Prevent the introduction of respiratory germs INTO your facility**

- Ensure staff do not come to work if they are ill.
- Any staff that develop symptoms of a respiratory infection while on-the-job should immediately:
  - Stop work, put on a facemask and self-isolate at home.
  - Inform the facility’s infection preventionist and provide information on individuals, equipment and locations the person came in contact with.
  - Contact and follow Maine CDC recommendations for next steps regarding testing, isolation and treatment.
- Ensure employees, residents and visitors follow hand and respiratory hygiene.
  - Ensure employees clean their hands according to CDC guidelines, including before and after contact with residents, after contact with contaminated surfaces or equipment, and after removing personal protective equipment (PPE).
  - Increase access to alcohol-based hand rub on each unit location and in general staff locations (e.g. a dispenser inside/outside every patient room).
  - Make sure tissues are available and any sink is well-stocked with soap and paper towels for hand washing.
- Limit visitors to the facility.
  - Post signs at the entrance instructing visitors not to visit if they have symptoms of respiratory infection and to check in before visiting residents.
- Post visual alerts (signs, posters) at entrances and in strategic places providing instruction on hand hygiene, respiratory hygiene, and cough etiquette
- Observe newly admitted residents for development of respiratory symptoms and implement appropriate infection prevention practices for incoming symptomatic residents.

**3. Prevent the spread of respiratory germs WITHIN your facility**

- Limit the movement of patients with respiratory illness (e.g., have them remain in their room)
- Identify dedicated staff to care for COVID-19 patients or patients with respiratory illness.
- Provide the right supplies to ensure easy and correct use of PPE.
  - Post signs on the door or wall outside of the resident room that clearly describe the type of precautions needed and required PPE. (Care of residents with undiagnosed respiratory infection use Standard, Contact, and Droplet Precautions with eye protection unless suspected diagnosis requires upgrading Droplet to Airborne Precautions, such as for COVID-19 or tuberculosis).
  - Make PPE, including facemasks, eye protection, gowns, and gloves, available immediately outside of the resident room.

Symptoms of respiratory infection, including COVID-19:

- Fever
- Cough
- Shortness of breath

- Position a trash bag/can near the PPE doffing area to any resident room to make it easy for employees to discard PPE.
- Monitor residents and employees for fever or respiratory symptoms.

**4. Prevent the spread of respiratory germs BETWEEN facilities**

- Notify the receiving facility prior to transferring a resident with an acute respiratory illness, including suspected or confirmed COVID-19, to a higher level of care.
- Report any possible COVID-19 illness in residents and employees to Maine CDC at 1-800-821-5821.

**5. Keep residents, their families and employees informed.**

- Describe what actions the facility is taking to protect them, including answering their questions and explaining what they can do to protect themselves and their fellow residents.

**6. Stay informed.**

- Check the **Maine CDC coronavirus webpage** (go to [www.maine.gov](http://www.maine.gov) and click on the link) and the federal **CDC coronavirus webpage** ([www.cdc.gov/covid19](http://www.cdc.gov/covid19)) daily to keep up-to-date on new guidance and COVID-19 activity in your community.
- Sign up for Maine CDC's Health Alerts (HANs) at <https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/newhan.shtml>
- Locations for which traveler restrictions are in place can be found at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html>
- CDC guidance for exposures that might warrant restricting asymptomatic healthcare personnel from reporting to work can be found at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/guidance-risk-assesment-hcp.html>

Long-term care facilities concerned that a resident, visitor, or employee may have been exposed to or have COVID-19 should contact Maine CDC immediately for consultation and guidance at **1-800-821-5821**.