

Press release

Trump Administration Announces New Resources to Protect Nursing Home Residents Against COVID-19

Jul 22, 2020 | Nursing facilities

As part of the unprecedented efforts taken by the Trump Administration, President Trump today announced several new Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) initiatives designed to protect nursing home residents from coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19).

“From the moment the threat of this virus materialized, the Trump Administration has placed a priority on protecting nursing home residents,” said CMS Administrator Seema Verma. “Today’s multi-pronged intervention represents the latest efforts in fulfilling that unwavering commitment. As caseloads continue to increase in areas around the country, it has never been more important that nursing homes have what they need to maintain a sturdy defense against the virus. These measures will help them do exactly that.”

New Funding

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) will devote \$5 billion of the Provider Relief Fund authorized by the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act to Medicare-certified long term care facilities and state veterans’ homes (“nursing homes”), to build nursing home skills and enhance nursing homes’ response to COVID-19, including enhanced infection control. This funding could be used to address critical needs in nursing homes including hiring additional staff, implementing infection control “mentorship” programs with subject matter experts, increasing testing, and providing additional services, such as technology so residents can connect with their families if they are not able to visit. Nursing homes must participate in the Nursing Home COVID-19 Training (described below) to be qualified to receive this funding. This new funding is in addition to the \$4.9 billion previously announced to offset revenue losses and assist nursing homes with additional costs related to responding to the COVID-19 public health emergency (PHE) and the shipments of personal protective equipment (PPE) provided to nursing homes by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

Enhanced Testing

Building on the initiative HHS announced last week, in which rapid point-of-care diagnostic testing devices will be distributed to nursing homes, and the new funding from the Provider Relief Fund, CMS will begin requiring, rather than recommending, that all nursing homes in states with a 5% positivity rate or greater test all nursing home staff each week. This new staff testing requirement will enhance efforts to keep the virus from entering and spreading through nursing homes by identifying asymptomatic carriers.

More than 15,000 testing devices will be deployed over the next few months to help support this mandate, with over 600 devices shipping this week. Funds from the Provider Relief Fund can also be used to pay for additional testing of visitors.

Additional Technical Assistance & Support

The Trump administration recently deployed federal Task Force Strike Teams to provide onsite technical assistance and education to nursing homes experiencing outbreaks in an effort to help reduce transmission and the risk of COVID-19 spread among residents. The first deployments took place in 18 nursing homes in Illinois, Florida, Louisiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Texas between July 18 and July 20. The Task Force Strike Teams are composed of clinicians and public health service officials from CMS, the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC), and the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health (OASH).

The Task Force Strike Teams went into nursing homes based on data they reported to the CDC that indicated an increase in COVID-19 cases. The teams focused on the four key areas of support, including keeping COVID-19 out of facilities, detecting COVID-19 cases quickly, preventing virus transmission, and managing staff. The goal was to determine what immediate actions nursing homes needed to take to help reduce the spread and risk of COVID-19 among residents, and to better understand what federal, state, and local resources nursing homes need to ensure the health and safety of their residents. CMS and its partners plan to use what is learned on the ground to determine remote education and other critical needs to support nursing homes and mitigate future outbreaks.

In addition, CMS, in partnership with the CDC, is rolling out an online, self-paced, on-demand Nursing Home COVID-19 Training focused on infection control and best practices. The training being offered has 23 educational modules and a scenario-based learning modules that include materials on cohorting strategies and using telehealth in nursing homes to assist facilities as they continue to work to mitigate the virus spread in their facilities. This program supplements training already underway to better equip nursing homes to contain and stop the spread of COVID-19. The training is a requirement for nursing homes to receive the additional funding from the Provider Relief Fund Program.

The training will be available to all 15,400 nursing homes nationwide along with specialized technical assistance to nursing homes who have been found to have infection prevention deficiencies in their most recent CMS inspection and had recent COVID-19 cases based upon their data submissions to CDC. A certificate of completion is offered and recognition badges can be downloaded for nursing homes to display on their website.

Weekly Data on High Risk Nursing Homes

Early on during this pandemic, CMS required nursing homes to inform residents, their families and representatives of COVID-19 cases in their nursing homes. Starting in May, CMS and CDC began collecting weekly data on each nursing home including their number of COVID-19 cases. Now that this data collection process has matured, the White House and CMS will release a list of nursing homes with an increase in cases that will be sent to states each week as part of the weekly Governor’s report to ensure states have the information needed to target their support to the highest risk nursing homes.

Today’s announcement builds on the unprecedented and aggressive actions CMS has taken to address the impact of COVID-19 in nursing homes.

The full list of CMS public health action for nursing homes on COVID-19 to date is in the chart below.

CMS Public Health Action for Nursing Homes on COVID-19 as of July 22, 2020

- February 6, 2020 CMS took action to prepare the nation’s healthcare facilities for the COVID-19 threat.

- March 4, 2020 CMS issued new guidance related to the screening of entrants into nursing homes.

- March 10, 2020 CMS issued guidance related to the use of PPE.

- March 13, 2020 CMS issued guidance on the restriction of nonessential medical staff and all visitors except in certain limited situations.

- March 23, 2020 CMS announced a suspension of routine inspections, and an exclusive focus on immediate jeopardy situations and infection control inspections.

- March 30, 2020 CMS announced that hospitals, laboratories, and other entities can perform tests for COVID-19 on people at home and in other community-based settings outside of the hospital - including nursing homes.
- April 2, 2020 CMS issued a call to action for nursing homes and state and local governments reinforcing infection control responsibilities and urging leaders to work closely with nursing homes on access to testing and PPE.
- April 15, 2020 CMS announced the agency will nearly double payment for certain lab tests that use high-throughput technologies to rapidly diagnose large numbers of COVID-19 cases.
- April 19, 2020 CMS announced it will require nursing homes to report cases of COVID-19 to all residents and their families, as well as directly to the CDC. On May 1, CMS published the proposed policy in an Interim Final Rule. The rule became effective on May 8.
- April 30, 2020 CMS announced the formation of an independent Commission that will conduct a comprehensive assessment of the nursing home response to COVID-19.
- May 6, 2020 CMS released a memorandum to State Survey Agency directors providing more details on the new reporting requirements of the Interim Final Rule.
- May 13, 2020 CMS published a new informational toolkit comprising recommendations and best practices from a variety of front line health care providers, governors' COVID-19 task forces, associations and other organizations and experts that is intended to serve as a catalogue of resources dedicated to addressing the specific challenges facing nursing homes as they combat COVID-19. Toolkit is found here: Toolkit
- May 18, 2020 CMS issued guidance for state and local officials on the reopening of nursing homes.

- June 1, 2020 CMS issued [guidance](#) to states on COVID-19 survey activities, CARES Act funding, enhanced enforcement for infection control deficiencies, and quality improvement activities in nursing homes. CMS also issued a [letter](#) to Governors.
- June 4, 2020 CMS post first set of underlying COVID-19 nursing home data and results from targeted inspections conducted by the agency since March 4, 2020 linked on [Nursing Home Compare](#).
- June 19, 2020 CMS [announced](#) membership of Independent Coronavirus Commission on Safety and Quality in nursing homes
- June 23, 2020 CMS released [FAQs](#) on nursing home visitation.
- June 25, 2020 CMS released a [memo](#) announcing the end of the emergency blanket waiver for the nursing home staffing data submission requirement.
- July 10, 2020 CMS [announced](#) it will deploy Quality Improvement Organizations (QIOs) across the country to provide immediate assistance to nursing homes in hotspot areas.
- July 14, 2020 HHS and CMS announced [initiative](#) for rapid point-of-care diagnostic devices and tests in nursing homes.

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