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Trump Administration Issues Key Recommendations to Nursing Homes, State and Local Governments

Frontline data informs new CMS/CDC guidance to help fight against COVID-19

Today, at the direction of President Trump, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), in consultation with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), issued critical recommendations to state and local governments, as well as nursing homes, to help mitigate the spread of the 2019 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) in nursing homes. The recommendations build on and strengthen recent guidance from CMS and CDC related to effective implementation of longstanding infection control procedures.

Nursing homes (also known as “skilled nursing facilities” under the Medicare program and “nursing facilities” under Medicaid; or “long-term care facilities”) have become an accelerator for the virus because residents, who are generally vulnerable to complications from the virus, are even more so in an enclosed environment like a nursing home. In one Maryland nursing home, COVID-19 cases grew from one confirmed case one day to 64 confirmed cases the next. Hundreds of facilities across the country are experiencing increased numbers of cases among residents. To address this spread, CMS, which inspects Medicare-participating facilities to ensure compliance with Federal safety rules, has worked hand-in-hand with CDC to provide nursing homes with clear guidance on how they can keep their residents safe. Most recently, on [March 13, CMS issued guidance](#) that advised nursing homes to restrict visitors, helping prevent introduction of the virus into these facilities.

Additionally, [on March 23, CMS announced](#) new, focused infection control surveys intended to assess facilities’ compliance with infection control requirements to ensure they are prepared to address the COVID-19 threat. In the initial wave of surveys during the week of March 30, CMS found that 36 percent of facilities inspected in recent days did not follow proper hand washing guidelines and 25 percent failed to demonstrate proper use of personal protective equipment (PPE). Both of these are longstanding infection control measures that all nursing homes are expected to follow per Federal regulation. CMS is continuing to conduct targeted infection control inspections to ensure nursing homes are prepared to confront COVID-19 and keep their residents safe. Finally, Medicare is now covering COVID-19 testing when furnished to eligible beneficiaries by certified laboratories. These laboratories [may also choose](#) to enter facilities to conduct COVID-19 testing.

The recommendations announced today include:

- Nursing homes should immediately ensure that they are complying with all CMS and CDC guidance related to infection control.
- As nursing homes are a critical part of the healthcare system, and because of the ease of spread in long term care facilities and the severity of illness that occurs in residents with COVID-19, CMS/CDC urges State and local leaders to consider the needs of long term care facilities with respect to supplies of PPE and COVID-19 tests.
- Nursing homes should immediately implement symptom screening for all staff, residents, and visitors – including temperature checks.
- Nursing homes should ensure all staff are using appropriate PPE when they are interacting with patients and residents, to the extent PPE is available and per CDC guidance on conservation of PPE.
- To avoid transmission within nursing homes, facilities should use separate staffing teams for residents to the best of their ability, and, as President Trump announced at the White House today, the administration urges nursing homes to work with State and local leaders to designate separate facilities or units within a facility to separate COVID-19 negative residents from COVID-19 positive residents and individuals with unknown COVID-19 status.

“The Trump Administration is calling on the nursing home industry and state and local leaders to join us by taking action now to ensure the safety of their residents, who are among our most vulnerable citizens. The Administration urges them to carefully review our recommendations, and implement them immediately,” said CMS Administrator Seema Verma.

Today’s recommendations will help State and local governments, and nursing homes, as they consider creative ways to stop the spread of the virus, such as designating units within facilities – or entire facilities – solely for residents with confirmed COVID-19. An example of such an arrangement is in Wilmington, Massachusetts, in which a 142-bed facility has been designated as a solely COVID-19-positive facility. Residents across the region who are infected with COVID-19 can be moved to this facility to receive appropriate care and avoid transmitting the virus within their facilities. This approach also eases the challenges of preventing transmission, like extensive PPE usage and isolation practices, for individual facilities. The Massachusetts arrangement, developed in coordination with the state’s government, is a prime example of the arrangements envisioned in the recommendations announced today.

The recommendations also speak to enhanced screening and transmission prevention practices. [Previous CMS guidance](#), developed with CDC and issued in mid-March, advised nursing homes to restrict all but the most urgent visitors and staff. Today’s guidance builds on this by recommending temperature screenings for all visitors and that all staff utilize adequate PPE when interacting with patients, to the extent PPE is available.

Nursing homes are unique in the healthcare system because, unlike other healthcare facilities, they are full-time homes as well as settings of care. Importantly, nursing home residents, given their advanced age and corresponding health issues, are at particular risk of complications arising from COVID-19. Because they are large concentrations of particularly vulnerable individuals, nursing homes have been a major focus for the Trump Administration in its aggressive efforts to combat the virus.

This [action](#), and earlier CMS actions in response to COVID-19, are part of the ongoing White House Coronavirus Task Force efforts. To keep up with the important work the Task Force is doing in response to COVID-19, visit www.coronavirus.gov. For a complete and updated list of CMS actions, and other information specific to CMS, please visit the [Current Emergencies Website](#).

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