NCDHHS Launches Testing Initiative for Nursing Homes

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The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS) will partner with Omnicare, a CVS Health company, to make facility-wide testing available to residents and staff in all North Carolina skilled nursing facilities. There are over 400 nursing homes in the state with approximately 36,000 residents and more than 30,000 staff. Testing will begin in July and continue through August.

“We are using every tool we have to respond to COVID-19,” said NCDHHS Secretary Mandy Cohen, M.D. “Building on North Carolina’s early and aggressive actions to protect residents who live in long-term care settings, DHHS will pay for proactive testing of staff and residents in all nursing homes to slow the spread of COVID-19.”

NCDHHS already recommends that nursing homes with one or more cases test all staff and residents. This initiative further makes testing available to all nursing homes to conduct a baseline test of all residents and staff.

“While testing is a key component of our COVID-response strategy, it is important to remember that the actions we take as a result of that testing are most important,” said NCDHHS Section Chief of Chronic Disease and Injury, Susan Kansagra, M.D., MBA. “Testing will enable our skilled nursing facilities to identify positive cases earlier and better determine additional infection prevention and control measures necessary to contain spread.”

“At CVS Health, our testing efforts in nursing homes are just one example of the support we provide to states like North Carolina to help respond to the COVID-19 pandemic,” said Jim Love, President of Omnicare. “With our expert understanding of the long-term care industry, we are deploying solutions to help these critically important health care facilities address their most significant challenges arising from the pandemic.”

CVS Health will bill insurance as possible, and NCDHHS will cover any additional costs for testing. Facilities should continue to follow recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for repeat testing and work with community and private vendors to support ongoing testing needs.

"We continue to work closely with the state to protect the residents and staff in our skilled nursing facilities. This testing initiative is another example of how the state is providing our facilities with valuable tools and resources," said Adam Sholar, President and CEO of the NC Health Care Facilities Association.

These actions build on earlier measures North Carolina has taken to protect residents and staff in long-term facilities, including:

- Issuing Executive Order 138 which codified public health and safety requirements for long-term care facilities, including requiring staff to wear surgical masks and screenings all staff and residents for signs and symptoms of COVID-19 daily.
- Distributing PPE to over 3,000 state-licensed long-term care facilities, including 14-day supplies of gloves, procedure masks and face shields.
- Conducting remote infection prevention and control consultation with skilled nursing and other long-term facilities across the state through a partnership with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the North Carolina Statewide Program for Infection Control and Epidemiology.
- Providing targeted funding to support nursing homes and adult care homes to provide the intensive care needed for residents with COVID-19 and limit the spread of the virus to other residents and staff.
- Providing a toolkit to support long-term care facilities in preparing for and responding to COVID-19 outbreaks in their facility. The toolkit contains an infection control assessment, infection staffing worksheet, infection prevention educational resources and other tools.
- Helping to fill staffing shortages in long-term care facilities and other health care facilities through a partnership with East Carolina University School of Nursing to match Registered Nurses and Certified Nursing Assistants with facilities, particularly long-term care facilities, seeking to urgently hire staff for temporary, part-time or full-time roles. Interested health care employees can register at nc.readyop.com/fs/4cjq/697b (https://nc.readyop.com/fs/4cjq/697b).
- Implementing several temporary regulatory changes to assist providers in caring for their residents during the COVID-19 pandemic, including adopting an emergency rule granting reciprocity to nurse aides certified in other states to work as nurse aides in

North Carolina and allowing facilities to exceed the number of licensed beds if needed to provide temporary shelter and services to adequately care for residents with COVID-19.

- Providing virtual trainings for more than 2,000 staff working in long-term care sites. Trainings are available online at www.ncahec.net/covid-19/webinars (https://www.ncahec.net/covid-19/webinars/).

A list of additional guidance for long-term care facilities can be found here: https://covid19.ncdhhs.gov/guidance#long-term-care-facilities (https://covid19.ncdhhs.gov/guidance#long-term-care-facilities).

For more information about North Carolina's response to COVID-19, visit nc.gov/covid19 (https://www.nc.gov/covid19).

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