State to continue providing rapid testing supplies as long-term care facilities transition to post-vaccine phase

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BISMARCK, N.D. – With over 85 percent of North Dakota's long-term care residents now fully vaccinated for COVID-19, Gov. Doug Burgum announced today that the state will shift from state-driven guidance to locally driven decisions in basic care and assisted living facilities, while also providing testing supplies to all long-term care facilities as they transition to a post-vaccination phase.

More than 90 percent of long-term care residents have received at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine, while over 85 percent of residents and 49 percent of staff have received both doses.

"These milestones bring tremendous hope and encouragement to long-term care residents, families and staff and allow facilities to begin implementing their post-vaccination plans," Burgum said. "Today, we are moving from state-driven guidance to locally driven decisions that are implemented by each assisted living and basic care facility. The state will continue to provide testing supplies for residents, staff and visitors and recommendations to help protect the most vulnerable and those who care for them."

North Dakota is one of the most open states in the nation when it comes to long-term care visitation, with all assisted living and basic care facilities allowing in-person visitation. Eighty percent of skilled nursing facilities are allowing in-person visitation; the other 20 percent have

COVID-19 cases among their residents and/or staff and are prohibited from having visitors under federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) regulations.

As facilities transition to locally driven post-vaccination plans, Burgum today will rescind two executive orders, 2020-22 and 2020-22.1, effective at 8 a.m. Friday, which among other things required assisted living and basic care facilities to conduct routine COVID-19 testing of residents and staff. Those facilities are still strongly encouraged to collaborate with the state's Vulnerable Population Protection Plan (VP3) team and follow the continuing recommendations on testing, service and visitation in accordance with standards of practice issued by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

To assist, the state will provide rapid testing supplies to the facilities free of charge, to help keep residents, staff and visitors safe by identifying asymptomatic cases to further curb the spread of COVID-19. North Dakota has approximately 2 million rapid antigen tests readily available.

Skilled nursing facilities must still follow CMS infection control protocols and visitation guidelines. Those facilities also are encouraged to work with the VP3 team to protect vulnerable residents and develop post-vaccination plans. Basic care and assisted living facilities are not regulated by CMS.

While over 85 percent of long-term care residents are fully vaccinated, only approximately 50 percent of long-term care staff are fully vaccinated. Interim State Health Officer Dirk Wilke noted that those who didn't get vaccinated can and are encouraged to still get vaccinated as the state moves into Phase 1C.

"If you were in Phase 1A or 1B of the vaccine prioritization and didn't get vaccinated, you didn't lose your turn. We encourage unvaccinated health care workers to seek out one of the three vaccines now available to protect themselves and the individuals in their care," Wilke said.

For more information on North Dakota's COVID-19 response, visit www.health.nd.gov/coronavirus or www.ndresponse.gov.

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