Communicating about COVID-19 in Congregate Settings

(Long-Term Care Facilities)

I. Background

SARS-CoV-2 is a novel coronavirus that causes coronavirus disease (abbreviated as COVID-19). Public health experts continue to learn about SARS-CoV-2, but based on current data and similar coronaviruses, spread from person-to-person happens most frequently among close contacts (those within about six feet) via respiratory droplets.

II. Purpose

This guidance addresses notification procedures by long-term care facilities to residents, residents' family, guardians, or emergency contacts, and to staff members, when a resident or a staff member is diagnosed with COVID-19. This guidance also addresses notification to a resident's family, guardian, or emergency contact when that resident has died from COVID-19.

Long-term care facilities are facilities licensed by the Department of Public Health (DPH) and include, but are not limited to, skilled nursing facilities, nursing facilities, shelter care facilities, assisted living facilities, shared housing establishments, life care facilities, intermediate care facilities, medically complex facilities for the developmentally disabled, and specialized mental health rehabilitation facilities.

III. Process

Long-term care facilities must provide notification to staff members, residents, residents' family, residents' guardians, conservators, or representatives (collectively "representative"), DPH, and local health departments (LHD) when persons working or residing in the long-term care facility are confirmed with COVID-19 infection. Such notification shall identify whether the individual was a staff member or resident. The facility shall not, however, reveal personally identifying information about the individual, including name, except as necessary to notify the resident's family or representative and to ensure staff members take sufficient safety precautions.

The following notifications must be provided within 12 hours after the facility's administration becomes aware of the event, unless sooner notification is required:

1. A verbal communication shall be provided immediately to a resident's family, and a resident's representative whenever a resident receives confirmation of COVID-19 infection.

2. A written notification shall be provided within 12 hours to each resident of the facility, resident's family, representative, and to all staff members, upon the occurrence of a single confirmed infection of COVID-19, or three or more residents or staff members with new-onset of respiratory symptoms that occur within 72 hours.

3. A written notification shall be provided immediately to DPH and the LHD upon the confirmation of COVID-19 infection of a resident or staff member. The written notification should confirm that the long-term care facility is notifying all staff members, residents, residents' families, and residents' representatives as provided in this guidance. Notification to DPH should be submitted to the Regional Office by email or fax.

4. A notice that indicates a resident or staff member of the facility has been confirmed with COVID-19 infection shall be posted in a conspicuous place near the main entrance of the facility.

5. Updates to residents, their families, their representatives, and staff members shall be provided weekly, or each subsequent time a confirmed infection of COVID-19 is identified and/or whenever three or more residents or staff members with new onset of respiratory symptoms occurs within 72 hours. In these updates, facilities will include information on mitigating actions implemented to prevent or reduce the risk of transmission, including if normal operations in the nursing home will be altered.

6. A verbal communication shall be provided immediately to a resident's family and a resident's representative whenever the long-term care facility receives notice that a resident has died from COVID-19.

The health and safety of the long-term care community is of the highest priority. The long-term care facility shall take the necessary steps to reduce the risk of infection as there is evidence in Illinois of widespread community transmission of COVID-19.

The long-term care facility shall follow the guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) as well as guidance from the State and local health departments for best practices and protocols.

- CDC Guidance for Nursing Homes & Long-Term Care Facilities is available here.
- DPH COVID-19 Control Measures for Long-Term Care is available here.

To prevent further spread of the disease, the long-term care facility shall proactively initiate and implement infection prevention strategies and practices including symptom screening of staff members and residents, enhanced environmental cleaning and disinfection, and visitor screening and restriction. In addition, staff members must wear masks at all times and closely monitor residents for any fever, symptoms, or health status changes.

After notifying DPH and the LHD as required by the Communicable Disease Code, the long-term care facility must coordinate with the local and the State health departments to promptly identify and monitor individuals who have had recent contact with any COVID-19 positive individual(s) to prevent further spread within the long-term care facility and community.

Revised 4/27/20

Published 4/19/20