

County of Santa Clara

Public Health Department

Health Officer
976 Lenzen Avenue, 2nd Floor
San José, CA 95126
408.792.3798



Memorandum

DATE: March 6, 2020

TO: Licensed Skilled Nursing Facilities and Other Long-term Care Facilities; Assisted Living Facilities and Independent Living Facilities in Santa Clara County

FROM: Sara H. Cody, MD
Health Officer

George S. Han, MD, MPH
Deputy Health Officer

RE: COVID-19 Guidance and Strategies for Long-Term Healthcare Facilities and Assisted or Independent Living Facilities in Santa Clara County

The County of Santa Clara Public Health Department is closely monitoring the ongoing COVID-19 situation. As of March 6, 2020, a total of 24 people have tested positive for the virus in Santa Clara County, and we expect that number to continue increasing over the coming days. This indicates that the novel coronavirus is circulating in our community, and that there is some level of community transmission occurring in our area. While information about risk factors for COVID-19 is still evolving, the best evidence currently available makes clear that risk of severe illness from COVID-19 begins to increase at age 50 and increases with age. Older residents of long-term care facilities (LTCFs; nursing homes, skilled nursing facilities, and assisted living facilities, and independent living facilities) appear to be particularly at risk for rapid transmission of and severe disease from COVID-19, including death. We have seen this occur in the outbreak of COVID-19 in a long-term care facility in the Seattle area, which has led to severe illness and death among the residents of that facility. Therefore, the best strategy is to do everything possible to prevent the introduction of the virus into your facility.

The Santa Clara County Public Health Department recommends that all long-term care facilities and assisted or independent living facilities take immediate steps to prepare for increases of COVID-19 in the community by meeting with administration/leadership, activating emergency operations, and rapidly implementing the following actions.

- 1. Plan and Prepare for COVID-19 at your facility**
 - a. Assign a person(s) responsible for implementing the following COVID-19 prevention activities and reporting to Public Health.
 - b. Review your facilities emergency operations, medical surge, pandemic influenza plans/flu plans. Consider the need to restrict COVID-19 cases to certain rooms and consider the possible need for a dedicated wing or other area exclusively for COVID-19 patients.

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- c. Post signs at the entrance instructing visitors not to visit if they have symptoms of respiratory infection.
 - d. Minimize social gatherings at your facility. During essential gatherings, such as mealtimes, encourage residents and staff to maintain an arm's length between one another, maintain good hand hygiene and cough etiquette, and have wipes available for use.
 - e. Put alcohol-based hand sanitizer in every resident room (ideally both inside and outside of the room) and ensure a stable supply.
 - f. Make sure tissues, wipes, and waste receptacles are widely available and all sinks are well-stocked with soap and paper towels for hand washing.
 - g. Provide the right supplies to ensure easy and correct use of PPE when needed.
 - i. Post [signs](#) on the door or wall outside of the resident room that clearly describe the type of precautions needed and required PPE.
 - ii. Make PPE, including facemasks, eye protection, gowns, and gloves, available immediately outside of the resident room.
 - iii. Position a trash can near the exit inside any resident room to make it easy for employees to discard PPE.
 - h. Review CDPH All Facilities Letter 20-17 guidance for program flex:
www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CHCQ/LCP/CDPH%20Document%20Library/AFL-20-17.pdf
- 2. Educate staff, residents, and families**
- a. Communicate about COVID-19 with your staff, residents, and their families. Share information about what is currently known about COVID-19, the potential for surge, and your facility's preparedness plans.
 - b. Make sure all employees know the symptoms of COVID-19 and how they can protect themselves and their patients.
 - c. Identify dedicated employees to care for COVID-19 cases and provide these employees with infection control training.
 - i. Guidance on implementing recommended infection prevention practices is available in CDC's free online course — [The Nursing Home Infection Preventionist Training](#) — which includes resources checklists for facilities and employees to use.
- 3. Screen staff, residents, and visitors**
- a. Discourage all non-essential visitors.
 - b. Implement a screening program where all staff and essential visitors are actively checked prior to entry for symptoms of respiratory infection. Staff with any symptom (even just cough) should not report to work or enter the facility until 3 days after their symptoms have resolved.
 - c. Ensure that your sick leave policies are flexible and consistent with public health guidance and that employees are aware of these policies.

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- d. Actively monitor and assess all residents, including new residents, for symptoms of respiratory infection.
- 4. Provide distancing and proper infection control for ill persons**
 - a. Restrict residents with fever or acute respiratory symptoms to their room. They should be moved to a private room if not in one. If they must leave the room for medically necessary procedures, have them wear a facemask.
 - b. Any resident with respiratory symptoms should receive care from dedicated staff using appropriate infection prevention practices.
 - c. Adhere to infection control guidelines for any resident with respiratory illness. In general, for care of residents with undiagnosed respiratory infection use Standard, Contact, and Droplet Precautions with eye protection unless suspected diagnosis requires Airborne Precautions (e.g., tuberculosis).
- 5. Notify and communicate**
 - a. Notify facilities prior to transferring a resident with any acute respiratory illness, including suspected or confirmed COVID-19, to another facility, including a higher level of care.
 - b. If a resident becomes ill with respiratory illness, consult their physician first. Report any possible COVID-19 illness in residents or employees to the Santa Clara County Public Health Department at 408-885-4214.

More resources:

- Infection preventionist training: www.cdc.gov/longtermcare
- CDC Resources for healthcare facilities: www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/healthcare-facilities