

Dear Providers,

As the COVID-19 cases in Pennsylvania continue to rise, we share our concern for the vulnerable populations living in Personal Care Homes and Assisted Living Residences.

On 3/29/20, the Department of Human Services (DHS) issued a suspension of numerous regulations, recognizing the challenges that Personal Care Homes and Assisted Living Residences are all facing and hope that in many cases, this will help to keep residents safe in their homes. If you are experiencing issues that have not been addressed in the guidance provided, please bring it to your Regional Director so that we may assist on a case by case basis.

In order to reduce the spread of infection, allow hospitals to focus on those with the most critical needs, and support residents in their own home, we are asking that Personal Care Homes and Assisted Living Residences follow the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) Guidance.

Personal Care Homes and Assisted Living Residences should be checking the Pennsylvania Department of Health (DOH), CDC and CMS websites on a DAILY basis. Information continues to evolve as we learn more about the virus and keeping informed is key to managing this effectively.

- Visitors should be restricted, except for medically necessary personnel and end-of-life compassionate care.
- Dining and communal activities should be done with social distancing.
- All staff should be screened before starting their shifts

Should a staff or resident be suspected or confirmed for COVID-19, notify DOH and your Regional Director.

While some regions of the state are not yet seeing a large number of cases reported in their area, Personal Care Homes and Assisted Living Residences should be preparing themselves for a potential outbreak in their facility. There are four areas of concern that should be focused on pro-actively.

Infection Control: In accordance with CDC and CMS guidelines, Personal Care Homes and Assisted Living Residences should prepare themselves to manage symptomatic residents in their own room or apartment. It is not advised that residents be sent to the hospital unless their situation warrants acute care.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE): All Personal Care Homes and Assisted Living Residences should have adequate protection on hand, as you would for any flu outbreak. While resources have been limited, more equipment is becoming available daily. You should be placing orders with your regular suppliers, reaching out to EMA, and contacting any other community organizations that may be able to assist. DOH may make equipment available if you have a positive case of COVID-19. However, Personal Care Homes and Assisted Living Residences should be using PPE in accordance with CDC guidelines to decrease the potential for an outbreak.

Staffing: To prepare for a possible shortage in staffing, Personal Care Homes and Assisted Living Residences should consider implementing 12 hour shifts, contacting home health care staffing agencies,

and partnering with nearby Personal Care Homes and Assisted Living Residences to share staffing in the event of an emergency. DHS advises all Personal Care Homes and Assisted Living Residences to develop a back-up plan now to be prepared for the possibility of a staffing shortage.

Isolating a resident who is suspected or confirmed as positive for COVID-19: Personal Care Homes and Assisted Living Residences should have infection control procedures in place that will allow for the isolation of a resident who is exhibiting symptoms or who has been confirmed as positive for COVID-19. If you do not have capacity in your facility to do this effectively, some options include creating a temporary space in your facility that can be used for this purpose, communicating with family members for a temporary stay, or coordinating with nearby Personal Care Homes and Assisted Living Residences that may have additional capacity. Personal Care Homes and Assisted Living Residences should review their Emergency Preparedness plans to proactively identify how they will manage an outbreak in their facility.

DHS is dedicated to identifying additional supports for Personal Care Homes and Assisted Living Residences. We are actively establishing partnerships with Home Care and Home Health provider networks to provide additional emergency on-site supports, if necessary. DHS is also actively exploring the development of a virtual learning environment in order to provide Personal Care Home and Assisted Living staff with COVID-19 resources through clinical experts from regional health systems.

While DHS understands that it is challenging, Personal Care Homes and Assisted Living Residences are reminded of their responsibilities to their residents to allow them to remain at, and return to, their homes during this crisis.

DHS reminds Personal Care Homes and Assisted Living Residences that, during the COVID-19 pandemic, they still must make every effort to retain residents, to readmit hospitalized residents, and to comply with the terms of their resident agreements. If Personal Care Homes and Assisted Living Residences do not make those efforts, then DHS may take an enforcement action against the facility.

Under the DHS licensing requirements, the resident has a right to remain in your facility and to return to your facility consistent with the facility's rules and the resident's service plan. See 55 Pa. Code §§ 2600.42(m) and 2600.42(u). The resident also has a right to return to the facility as set forth in its resident agreement, which may include the opportunity to pay a charge to hold the resident's bed. See 55 Pa. Code § 2600.25.

In addition to those resident rights, the licensing regulations require your facility to have written policies and procedures on the prevention, investigation and management of reportable incidents and conditions, which includes communicable diseases. See 55 Pa. Code § 2600.16(a) (7) and 2600.16(b). Your facility also must comply with all federal, state and local health and safety laws. See 55 Pa. Code §§ 2600.18.

DHS encourages all Personal Care Homes and Assisted Living Residences to stay up to date on the most recent developments and resources at the following websites:

CDC: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/hcp/index.html>

PA DOH: <https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/disease/coronavirus/Pages/Coronavirus.aspx>

PA DHS: <https://www.dhs.pa.gov/providers/Providers/Pages/Coronavirus-2020.aspx>