

Hospice and Palliative Care Resources for the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19)



NHPCO COVID-19 Update – 03/10/21

NHPCO has created this update for hospice and palliative care providers to share recent news and helpful links. Please note, these Updates are published when there is helpful news to share.

“There is no medicine like hope, no incentive so great, and no tonic so powerful as expectation of something better tomorrow.” – Orison Swett Marde

Policy Update

Congress Passes \$1.9 Trillion COVID-19 Relief Package

Today, Congress passed H.R.1319, The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, a more than 600-page coronavirus relief package that provides \$1.9 trillion in spending. President Biden is expected to sign the legislation into law. The bill includes economic assistance programs related to the COVID-19 PHE as well as several COVID-19 and hospice related provisions. Learn More in this Policy Alert for NHPCO Members available on the [Regulatory Alerts and Updates](#) page of the website.

CMS Updates Nursing Home Visitation Guidance with Revised Recommendations

- **Updated nursing home visitation guidance:** On March 10, 2021, CMS updated their guidance in [QSO-20-39-NH](#), originally issued in September 2020 regarding visitation in nursing homes. The guidance significantly relaxes the visitation guidance, stating that outdoor visitation is preferred, but indoor visitation is now allowed. The CMS memo states that “facilities should allow indoor visitation at all times and for all residents (regardless of vaccination status), except for a few circumstances when visitation should be limited due to a high risk of COVID-19 transmission (note: compassionate care visits should be permitted at all times).” The guidance provides some scenarios for allowing indoor visitation for both vaccinated and unvaccinated residents and visitors. CMS has also issued a [fact sheet](#) on this revised guidance
- **Entry for healthcare workers:** There is no change in the guidance for health care workers, including hospice workers, and their ability to enter the facility. The guidance states:

Health care workers who are not employees of the facility but provide direct care to the facility’s residents, such as hospice workers, Emergency Medical Services (EMS) personnel, dialysis technicians, laboratory technicians, radiology technicians, social workers, clergy, etc., must be permitted to come into the facility as long as they are not subject to a work exclusion due to an exposure to COVID-19 or showing signs or symptoms of COVID-19 after being screened.

- **Compassionate care visits:** Visits for compassionate care, such as an end-of-life situation or a residents in decline or distress should be allowed at all times for any resident (vaccinated or unvaccinated), regardless of the above scenarios. In addition, facilities and visitors should continue all infection prevention and control practices.

National COVID Testing Strategy

[Politico reports](#), “The Biden administration is preparing to launch the first of several Covid-19 testing hubs to coordinate and oversee a \$650 million expansion of testing in K-8 schools and congregate settings like homeless shelters. HHS hopes to open the first hub in April, as part of a public-private partnership that could eventually add up to 25 million tests per month to the nation’s testing totals, two sources briefed on the plans told POLITICO. The effort is the first attempt at formalizing a national testing strategy — something public-health experts have wanted for months.”

Provider Update

About Variants of the Virus that Causes COVID-19

As the CDC works to fight the COVID-19 pandemic, [emerging variants are threatening progress](#). If one of the variants is able to evade the vaccine, progress will be slowed or potentially reversed. The window of opportunity to halt the pandemic is now. By the time a variant is detected in a community, it may already be spreading. Proven strategies to prevent spread can limit the impact of these variants. The emergence of variants can be slowed by reducing transmission. Everyone should wear a well-fitting mask and follow CDC’s prevention recommendations. Scientists are working to learn more about these variants, and more studies are needed to understand:

- How widely these new variants have spread
- How the disease caused by these new variants differs from the disease caused by other variants that are currently circulating
- How these variants may affect existing therapies, vaccines, and tests

Reports of 'Breakthrough' COVID Cases After Vaccine

A [WebMD News Brief](#) reports, “A small number of people have tested positive for COVID-19 more than two weeks after being fully vaccinated, which is also known as a “breakthrough” case. The two-week mark is important because the body needs enough time to develop immunity, according to Prevention. So far, those with breakthrough cases have reported mild or no symptoms. Earlier this week, the Minnesota Department of Health announced that it was investigating several of these cases across the state. The department issued an advisory that asked hospitals, clinics, urgent care centers and emergency departments to report any cases where people test positive for COVID-19 at least 14 days after completing their second vaccine dose.”

New U.S. COVID-19 Cases Fall 12% Last Week, Vaccinations Pop 2 million a Day

An [article from Reuters](#) reports, “The United States reported a 12% decline in new cases of COVID-19 last week, while vaccinations accelerated to a record 2.2 million shots per day, according to a Reuters analysis of state, county and CDC data. New infections have dropped for eight weeks in a row, averaging 60,000 new cases per day for the week ended March 7. Deaths linked to COVID-19 fell 18% last week to 11,800, the lowest since late November and averaging 1,686 per day. Despite the positive trends, health officials have warned that the country could see a resurgence in cases as more infectious variants of the virus have been found in nearly every state.”

Resources

Advancing Health Literacy to Enhance Equitable Community Responses to COVID-19

As part of President Biden’s National Strategy for the COVID-19 Response and Pandemic Preparedness, the Administration is announcing an effort to invest [\\$250 million to encourage COVID-19 safety and vaccination](#)

[among underserved populations](#). The Department of Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health will offer the funding as health literacy grants to localities, who will partner with community-based organizations, to reach racial and ethnic minority, rural and other vulnerable populations. The new initiative – [Advancing Health Literacy to Enhance Equitable Community Responses to COVID-19](#) – is expected to fund approximately 30 projects in urban communities and 43 projects in rural communities for two years. Cities, counties, parishes or other similar subdivisions may apply for the funding.

CNN on End-of-Life Doulas and COVID

" In an [article published by CNN](#), "End-of-life doulas help people die comfortably. In a pandemic, they're more important than ever," they look at growth of End-of-Life Doulas in the U.S. and the value they can bring during this pandemic. NHPCO's [EOL Doula Advisory Council](#) is helping hospice providers understand how to effectively use EOLDs to support the team.

CMS Engagement Announcement

As COVID-19 vaccines continue rolling out across the country CMS is taking action to protect the health and safety of our nation's patients and providers and keeping you updated on the latest COVID-19 resources from HHS, CDC and CMS. With information coming from many different sources, CMS has compiled resources and materials to help you share important and relevant information on the COVID-19 vaccine with the people that you serve. You can find these and more resources on the [COVID-19 Partner Resources Page](#) and the [HHS COVID Education Campaign page](#). Each state has its own plan for deciding who they will vaccinate first and how residents can get vaccines. [Contact your local health department](#) for more information on COVID-19 vaccines in your area. [Learn more about COVID-19 vaccine progress](#).

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