

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



NHPCO COVID-19 Update – 08/26/20

NHPCO has created this update for hospice and palliative care providers to share recent news and helpful links.

"Surprise yourself every day with your own courage."

— Denholm Elliott

Policy Update

Next COVID-19 Package Delayed Until September

It has been reported by *Politico* that White House Chief of Staff Mark Meadows said Wednesday he is not optimistic about reaching a new coronavirus relief deal before the end of September. It is possible that the next COVID-19 legislative package may come together before the end of the fiscal year.

CMS publishes Interim Final Rule to Add Testing Requirement for Nursing Homes – Includes Testing for Hospice Staff

On August 25, CMS moved from recommending testing for residents and staff to requiring it with the publication of an [Interim Final Rule 3401-IFC](#). This interim Final Rule amends current infection control requirements for LTC facilities at § 483.80. Under this requirement, "staff" are considered:

- any individuals employed by the facility,
- any individuals that have arrangements to provide services for the facility, and
- any individuals volunteering at the facility.
- **an example of individuals providing services under arrangement include a hospice that may have an agreement in accordance with the requirements for the use of outside resources under § 483.70(g) and (o) to provide hospice care for residents in the facility. We expect that only those individuals that are physically working on-site at the facility be required to be tested for COVID-19.**
- the facility may have staff, including individuals providing services under arrangement and volunteers, who provide services for the facility from an off-site location that is not physically located within the facility, and such staff would not be required to be tested for COVID-19.

Laboratories and nursing homes using point-of-care testing devices will be required to report diagnostic test results as required by the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act). CMS recommendations for the frequency of staff testing will be based on the degree of community spread, to be announced shortly through guidance, that indicate the facility may be at increased risk for COVID-19 transmission. On nursing home residents, CMS will now require nursing homes to offer tests to residents when there is an outbreak or residents show symptoms.

Nursing Home Testing Machines and NH Specific Provider Relief Funds

Data has shown that nursing home residents are particularly vulnerable to COVID-19 and HHS has taken a number of steps to protect seniors. As has been announced before, HHS is [sending every single nursing home in the country \(15,000\) a machine to test for COVID-19](#) that produces fast results so they can protect residents and get ahead of any outbreak. CMS has also dedicated [\\$5 billion from the Provider Relief Fund](#) to help nursing homes pay for the staff, training, and other resources needed to better protect residents. It is of note that on July 27, 2020, NHPCO [sent a letter](#) to Secretary of Health and Human Services Alex Azar and Center for

Medicare and Medicaid Studies (CMS) Administrator Seema Verma requesting \$500 million in dedicated funding for COVID-19 testing for hospice staff working in patients' homes, nursing homes, and assisted living facilities. This funding would support access to both individual test kits and rapid point-of-care testing equipment.

CMS Launches National Training Program to Strengthen Nursing Home Infection Control Practices

Today, under the leadership of President Trump, [CMS is implementing an unprecedented national nursing home training program for frontline nursing home staff and nursing home management](#). The training is designed to equip both frontline caregivers and their management with the knowledge they need to stop the spread of COVID-19 in their nursing homes. The training announced today will be available immediately to staff of America's 15,400 Medicare and Medicaid certified nursing homes and focuses on critical topics like infection control and prevention, appropriate screening of visitors, effective cohorting of residents, safe admission and transfer of residents, and the proper use of personal protective equipment (PPE) – all critical elements of stopping the spread of COVID-19. President Trump first announced the training in late July as part of the Trump Administration's unwavering commitment to the safety of American seniors living in nursing homes. The training is only the latest in a long list of decisive actions the Trump Administration has taken to safeguard America's nursing homes.

Medicaid Informational Bulletin to Increase Nursing Facility Reimbursement

On August 24, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services released a [Medicaid Informational Bulletin \(CIB\)](#) that provides guidance to states on flexibilities that are available to increase reimbursement for nursing facilities that implement specific infection control practices, such as designating a quarantine or isolation wing for COVID-19 patients.

Nursing facilities are particularly vulnerable to the prevalence and spread of COVID-19 and states must take proactive steps to enhance infection control policies, including establishing practices to limit potential transmission, and prevent widespread outbreaks within these facilities. Today's guidance highlights specific steps some states have taken to better support nursing facilities' ability to safely care for all residents, including COVID-19 positive residents, and how enhanced reimbursement supported those efforts. The CIB includes information on the Disaster State Plan Amendments (SPA) template and describes how states may use state-directed payments to increase reimbursement to nursing facilities in managed care. This week's release encourages states to utilize the flexibilities that are available and in alignment with applicable Centers for Disease Control guidance and coordinated with the state agency responsible for nursing facility compliance.

Resources

DAC Position Paper: COVID-19 and Supporting Black Communities at the End of Life

NHPCO's Advisory Council released a new Position Paper, [COVID-19 and Supporting Black Communities at the End of Life](#). The paper was released in conjunction with the Diversity Advisory Council social media takeover on August 25. NHPCO's Diversity Advisory Council prepared the Position Paper to help communities at all levels better understand the "why," with an emphasis on building trust with diverse populations relative to patient care and the pain, misery, grief, and sorrow caused by the pandemic.

Special Edition: COVID-19 Lessons Learned (HHS/ASPR TRACIE)

In the seven months since a public health emergency was declared due to the COVID-19 pandemic, stakeholders are rapidly learning key lessons, driving innovation and making significant adjustments to protect patient and staff health. Working with subject matter experts, ASPR TRACIE has gathered and shared timely information throughout the pandemic. ASPR TRACIE has created a resource in "digest format," allowing you to access

numerous articles, tools, quick sheets, and templates—all vetted by SMEs and listed by category. [Download the resource from ASPR TRACIE.](#)

How the COVID Pandemic is Impacting Children (Webinar Series)

ASPR TRACIE and [ASPR's Pediatric Centers of Excellence](#) are collaborating on a webinar series focused on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children. Topics will include impacts on child health and wellness, child emotional and social effects, the impact of COVID-19 on children with special healthcare needs, and how secondary/other disasters may affect children during the pandemic. The first webinar, focused on child health and wellness, will take place on September 30, 2020 from 1:30-2:45 PM ET. [Register today.](#)

The *Hospitalist* shared links to five articles of interest that we pass along in today's COVID-19 Update.

1. [How long will the pandemic last? Doctors weigh in](#), The Physician Foundation
2. [CMS boosts its inpatient COVID payment](#), MLN Matters
3. [Convalescent plasma: The data aren't there yet](#), *The New York Times*
4. [Obesity: a risk factor for men, younger people](#), *Annals of Internal Medicine*
5. [Canines and coronavirus](#), *The Washington Post*

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