



May 6, 2020

The Honorable Robert P. Casey, Jr.  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Casey:

Thank you for your recent letter to the Administrator of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services Seema Verma and me regarding the impact of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) on the older Americans and nursing home residents. We recognize that there are special concerns regarding the vulnerability of the elderly during this pandemic. I am responding on behalf of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

The public health response is multi-layered, with the goal of preventing and controlling the spread of COVID-19, to mitigate the impact of the virus and the disease on the American public and vulnerable communities, and to prepare the health system and protect health care workers on the frontlines. The agency's approach to COVID-19 seeks to respond to this dynamic and fast-moving emergency while building upon decades of experience with prior infectious disease emergencies.

CDC and the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) are working together to align COVID-19 guidance for healthcare facilities and healthcare personnel (HCP) to protect patients and personnel, encourage safe practices, improve health outcomes, and save lives, including in long term care (LTC) facilities. This includes promoting best practices for LTC care facilities to HCP, administrators, health departments and public health partners for testing and treatment of COVID-19. CDC built a LTC tool kit to be distributed to all 50 states to help increase infection prevention and control preparedness in nursing homes and provide remote tools to further assist these important healthcare providers. CDC and CMS continue to work with health departments and LTC care facilities to improve the implementation of CMS and CDC guidance.

CDC rapidly sent teams of infection control experts to support the state and local health departments during the COVID-19 outbreak in a King County, Washington LTC care facility. Teams were on the ground within 36 hours of the notification to assist with the implementation of measures to detect and contain additional infections in the community. CDC has provided extensive support and technical assistance to multiple states and the District of Columbia as they respond to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on LTC care facility residents and healthcare personnel. CDC continues to work closely with state and local health departments to assist LTC care facilities with COVID-19, with on the ground support provided to more than 30 jurisdictions. CDC staff are simultaneously providing extensive remote technical assistance from infection control experts to almost every state. Assistance for LTC care facilities and state and local health departments includes developing tools and guidance to guide prevention efforts; directly conducting tele-assessments of infection control practices to provide tailored recommendations to improve infection prevention and control efforts; and conducting testing in facilities for SARS-CoV-2 via point prevalence surveys among residents and healthcare personnel to assist in controlling the spread of the virus in facilities by determining the burden of COVID-19 in the facility.

CDC is also working with CMS to leverage existing data systems and reporting requirements to improve COVID-19 surveillance and response across the healthcare spectrum. As announced on April 19, 2020, with CMS' release of new regulatory requirements for nursing homes ([www.cms.gov/files/document/qso-20-26-nh.pdf](http://www.cms.gov/files/document/qso-20-26-nh.pdf)), CDC released a new reporting tool that allows nursing homes to provide data to CDC's National Healthcare Safety Network (NHSN) on COVID-19 disease burden among residents and staff, as well as critical facility capacity issues, including staffing and supply shortages ([www.cdc.gov/nhsn](http://www.cdc.gov/nhsn)). This new NHSN capability for nursing homes follows the launch of CDC's NHSN Hospital Capacity and Patient Impact COVID-19 Module ([www.cdc.gov/nhsn/acute-care-hospital/covid19/index.html](http://www.cdc.gov/nhsn/acute-care-hospital/covid19/index.html)). Given the breadth of reporting capability of NHSN, CDC was able to quickly adapt the system to collect nursing home data. This coordinated effort with CMS will allow CDC to provide even more detailed information to health departments about the burden of COVID-19 in LTC care facilities in order to develop additional recommendations to keep residents safe.

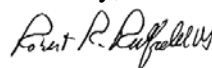
Previously, CDC obtained a snapshot of the burden of COVID-19 in LTC care facilities through existing Healthcare Associated Infection – Antibiotic Resistance (HAI-AR) programs within state health departments, to which CDC provides annual support. CDC asked these HAI-AR programs to compile data on the current burden of COVID-19 in LTC care facilities within their state during the weeks of March 16 and 23, 2020. Counts of nursing homes with positive cases were provided by HAI-AR Programs within state health departments and compiled by CDC to provide a national picture. State HAI-AR Programs do not provide facility names or other identifiers to CDC. CDC does not release facility names or other identifiers from other sources either due to the Assurance of Confidentiality provided by NHSN ([www.cdc.gov/os/integrity/confidentiality/index.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/os/integrity/confidentiality/index.htm)).

We are adjusting our response and guidance as conditions change and as we learn more about this emerging infectious disease. Please regularly visit our COVID-19 website [www.cdc.gov/ncov](http://www.cdc.gov/ncov) for CDC's latest and most up-to-date information, resources, and guidance.

While CDC experts are focused on addressing this unprecedented public health emergency, we know you have questions that deserve answers. In this fast-moving pandemic, CDC and its federal partners are providing regular briefings for Congressional members and staff to keep policy makers informed on these rapidly evolving developments. In addition, the CDC Washington Office is sending daily updates to Congressional staff with case counts and information about new guidance for key stakeholders and other important updates. We understand that you and your constituents have ongoing concerns about COVID-19. Please contact Anstice Brand Kenefick in our CDC Washington Office at (202) 245-0600 or [abrand@cdc.gov](mailto:abrand@cdc.gov) when you have further questions.

Thank you, again, for the work you do to protect the American people and for your interest in this ongoing response. We appreciate your support, and that of Congress, as we all work together. CDC remains committed to protecting the American public in the face of this pandemic. A copy of this response has been sent to Senator Wyden.

Sincerely,



Robert R. Redfield, MD  
Director, CDC