



January 15, 2021

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

Dear Senator Casey:

Thank you for your letter to Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) Alex M. Azar II and Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) Administrator Seema Verma regarding Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) vaccinations for long-term care facility (LTCF) and nursing home residents and workers. I am responding on behalf of Secretary Azar.

We understand that health care settings in general, and long-term care settings in particular, are high-risk settings for exposure to and transmission of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. Early protection of health care personnel is critical to maintaining sufficient capacity to ensure continuity of care for patients, residents, and clients with COVID-19 and resiliency of the health care system generally. LTCF residents, because of their age, high rates of underlying medical conditions, and congregate living situation, are at higher risk for infection with SARS-CoV-2, and for severe COVID-19, and they also experience higher mortality. Because of these factors and the limited initial supply of COVID-19 vaccines, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) vaccine advisory committee, the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP), voted on December 1, 2020, to recommend that the initial phase 1a of the vaccination program prioritize both health care personnel and residents of nursing homes, and other LTCFs, such as those for the developmentally disabled, assisted living facilities, and residential care facilities.

CDC adopted this recommendation on December 2, 2020, which is detailed in "The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices' Interim Recommendation for Allocating Initial Supplies of COVID-19 Vaccine — United States, 2020" report in CDC's *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*.<sup>1</sup> The Pfizer vaccine was administered to health care workers beginning December 14, 2020, following the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) December 11, 2020, Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) the vaccine product, ACIP's recommendation of the vaccine, and CDC's adoption of that recommendation. Vaccine administration for LTCF residents began that same week.

HHS and CDC are partnering with CVS, Walgreens, and select pharmacies in the Managed Health Care Associates network to offer on-site COVID-19 vaccination services for LTCF residents. The Federal Pharmacy Partnership for Long-term Care (LTC) Program is facilitating safe vaccination of this critical population. At no cost to facilities, the program provides end-to-

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<sup>1</sup> Dooling K, McClung N, Chamberland M, et al. The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices' Interim Recommendation for Allocating Initial Supplies of COVID-19 Vaccine — United States, 2020. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep* 2020;69:1857-1859. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6949e1>

end management of the COVID-19 vaccination process, including cold chain management, on-site vaccinations, and fulfillment of reporting requirements. This program is being implemented in close coordination with jurisdictions; LTCFs; federal partners, including CMS; and professional organizations, including the American Health Care Association and Leading Age, which have members across both nursing homes and assisted living facilities.

Jurisdictions provide CDC at least a two-week notice when they want to begin the LTCF program. This period allows federal pharmacy partners to prepare for vaccine administration and coordinate with LTCFs. Jurisdictions select which of the two vaccines approved under the FDA EUA will be used to support the program in their jurisdiction. This program launched on December 21, 2020, for jurisdictions that opted to use the Pfizer vaccine. More than 1,100 vaccination clinics at LTCFs across the country were scheduled to occur on this day. The program launch date for jurisdictions that chose to use the Moderna vaccine was scheduled for December 28, 2020. These launch dates allowed pharmacies and facilities to work with residents and their families and caregivers to understand the vaccines and agree to participate before the program began.

CDC recognizes the importance of having accurate data on vaccine distribution and dispensing to help jurisdictions make informed planning decisions. Partner pharmacies input data daily into a tracking system to help public health jurisdictions and CDC have a broad picture of vaccine availability and opportunities to improve vaccination coverage in communities. Pharmacies use the jurisdictions' immunization information systems (IISs) or the Vaccine Administration Management System (VAMS), if possible. Most pharmacy chains are connected to jurisdiction IISs, which facilitates timely reporting. If a pharmacy is unable to connect to an IIS or VAMS, CDC can help provide pharmacy information to jurisdictions. CDC is providing data on COVID-19 vaccinations on our COVID Data Tracker webpage<sup>2</sup> with information on the number of doses distributed to and administered in each state, including through the Federal Pharmacy Partnership for LTC Program.

LTCFs are not required to participate in the Pharmacy Partnership for LTC Program. A facility can opt to have vaccine supply and management services coordinated by a pharmacy provider of their choice (who must be an enrolled COVID-19 vaccine provider with CDC) or opt in at a later time. If an LTCF does not participate in the pharmacy partnership program, the LTCF and the pharmacy provider of their choice are responsible for coordination of and adherence to all vaccine supply chain, storage, handling, administration, and reporting requirements, including strict cold chain and public health reporting requirements. To administer COVID-19 vaccine, providers sign a provider agreement, which requires reporting of specific data elements once vaccine has been administered. In addition, CDC launched a new module in the National Healthcare Safety Network Vaccine Component to include COVID-19 vaccinations on December 20, 2020. This allows health care facilities to voluntarily report weekly aggregate data on the number and percentage of health care workers and LTCF residents in each facility who have received the COVID-19 vaccine.

Regarding your concern of reports of staffing shortages in nursing homes, CDC has produced comprehensive guidance on methods to mitigate staffing shortages.<sup>3</sup> We have also produced

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<sup>2</sup> <https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#vaccinations>

<sup>3</sup> [www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/mitigating-staff-shortages.html](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/mitigating-staff-shortages.html)

guidance to help address vaccine side effects in both health care personnel<sup>4</sup> and LTCF residents.<sup>5</sup> The guidance balances the need to avoid unnecessary staff furloughs with keeping residents, clients, and health care personnel safe.

Thank you 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 to fight COVID-19. CDC remains committed to protecting the American public during this pandemic. Please contact Christina Serna in our CDC Washington Office at (202) 245-0600 or [cserna@cdc.gov](mailto:cserna@cdc.gov) if you have further questions. A copy of this response has been sent to Senator Wyden.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert R. Redfield MD". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Robert R. Redfield, MD  
Director, CDC

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<sup>4</sup> [www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/post-vaccine-considerations-healthcare-personnel.html](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/post-vaccine-considerations-healthcare-personnel.html)

<sup>5</sup> [www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/post-vaccine-considerations-residents.html](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/post-vaccine-considerations-residents.html)