

DOH RELEASES REOPENING DIRECTIVES TO ENSURE SAFE REOPENING OF LONG-TERM CARE FACILITIES

Commissioner Persichilli announced on Monday a new directive for the phased reopening of long-term care facilities to implement certain requirements and preparations in the event of a surge of COVID-19 and to attest about their preparations to the Department of Health (DOH). When facilities conclude their outbreaks and implement the requirements of the DOH's directive, they will advance in phases, and in each phase, will be able to restore services for residents and ultimately allow for indoor visitation and resumption of normal activities.

The phased-in reopening is based on the outbreak status of a facility, its ability to meet criteria including but not limited to testing of staff and residents, infection control protocols, and adequate staffing and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), and is tied to the timing of the state's reopening plan. In order to assist facilities with the cost of testing benchmarks, DOH also announced \$25 million in funding, which will assist long-term care facilities with the cost of weekly testing for all staff.

Under the DOH directive, when a facility is permitted to enter a reopening phase depends on compliance with the following benchmarks:

- Facilities must not have an active outbreak. An outbreak is considered concluded when a facility has 28 days – two incubation periods with no new positive staff or residents – and, if a CMS-certified facility, a DOH survey inspection.
- They must be fully staffed and have a plan for additional staffing in case of an outbreak or emergency.
- Staff testing must continue to be conducted weekly.
- It is essential that they have enough PPE for present use in addition to a stockpile for emergencies.
- They must have an updated outbreak plan with lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic. The plan must also include a communications strategy that outlines regular communication with residents and families about cases and outbreaks or any other emergency. The plan must also include methods for virtual communication in the event of visitation restrictions. The plan must be posted on their website.
- Facilities must contract with an infection control service within two months or hire a full-time employee in the infection control role if they have more than 100 beds or hemodialysis.
- Facilities with ventilator beds are required to hire an infection control employee per current statute.
- Every facility will be required to put in place within nine months a respiratory protection program that complies with Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) standards including medical screenings and fit testing of employees using respirators (N95 Masks).

There are four phases of DOH's reopening plan as outlined in the directive, all tied to the state's planned stages of reopening. All facilities start in Phase 0 as of today.

Once visitation can begin, facilities must follow rigorous infection prevention and control protocols, including:

- Visitor screening, including temperature checks;
- Requiring visitors to practice routine infection prevention and control precautions including wearing a mask and social distancing;
- Having a plan that limits hours of visitation and number of visitors in the facility at one time. Residents will be limited to two visitors at a time;
- Identifying a visitation area that allows for social distancing and deep cleaning if the resident is in a shared room;
- Receiving informed consent from the visitor and resident acknowledging that they are aware of the risks of exposure to COVID-19 and that they will follow rules set by the facility;
- Instructing visitors to monitor for fever or other COVID-19 symptoms for at least 14 days after their visit, and to immediately notify the facility if they experience symptoms.

Recognizing that some residents need additional support regardless of the situation at their facility or their COVID status, a new category of essential caregiver will be added for all residents with proper precautions such as screening and the use of PPE.

Click on the following link to read the DOH directive; https://www.state.nj.us/.../8-20_ExecutiveDirectiveNo20-026_L...