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To: Skilled Nursing Facilities, Rest Homes, Assisted Living Residences
From: Kevin Cranston, MDiv, Director, BIDLS
Margret Cooke, JD, Deputy Commissioner
Date: March 12, 2021
RE: Updates to Long-Term Care Surveillance Testing

A. Overview

This memorandum applies to all long-term care settings including nursing homes, rest homes and assisted living residences (ALRs) and shall take effect on March 18, 2021. In consideration of decreasing indicators of community transmission and in recognition of the fact that many staff are now fully vaccinated, the Department of Public Health (DPH) is updating this surveillance testing memorandum to require long-term care facilities to continue to conduct weekly testing of all staff, however staff who are fully vaccinated (14 days or more from receiving the final dose in the series) must only be tested every other week. Compliance with the testing program is required in nursing homes and rest homes. Compliance with the testing program is recommended in ALRs.

To protect the health and safety of long-term care residents and staff against the spread of COVID-19, all long-term care settings must continue to implement the surveillance testing program that began with baseline staff testing completed no later than July 19, 2020, in accordance with this updated memorandum and, with respect to nursing homes participating in MassHealth, with accompanying MassHealth guidance. Any test conducted in accordance with this guidance must be able to detect SARS-CoV-2 virus, with a polymerase chain reaction (PCR) of greater than 95 percent sensitivity and greater than 90 percent specificity. For the purposes of a provider's surveillance testing program, a "week" means from 7:00 AM Thursday morning through 6:59 AM the following Thursday morning. This testing program may be updated as more is learned about the COVID-19 virus.

B. Surveillance Testing Program

Long-term care facilities must conduct weekly testing of all staff, however staff who are fully vaccinated (14 days or more from receiving the final dose in the series) must only be tested every other week.

If the staff testing results indicate a positive COVID-19 staff member(s), then the provider must conduct outbreak testing of all residents and staff to ensure there are no resident cases and to

assist in proper cohorting of residents. Testing must take place as soon as possible and within 48 hours.

For purposes of this memorandum, CDC and CMS define a close contact as while they were symptomatic or within the 48 hours before symptom onset or, if asymptomatic, the 48 hours before the test was completed to the 10 days after the test was completed. Symptoms of COVID-19 include fever or chills, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, new loss of taste or smell, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, nausea or vomiting, or diarrhea.

C. Previously Positive Individuals Cleared from Isolation:

Individuals previously diagnosed with COVID-19 infection confirmed by molecular diagnostic testing may continue to have PCR detection of viral RNA for many weeks. This does not correlate with the presence or transmissibility of live virus. Due to recent evidence of local transmission of variants of concern, and limited data of the effectiveness of natural immunity from a prior infection, individuals more than 6 months from the date of original infection should now be included in surveillance testing.

Accordingly, for the purposes of the surveillance testing program, recovered or previously COVID-19 positive staff less than 6 months from the date of original infection do not need to be re-tested and will not be included as part of total staff when determining if the facility met the required staff surveillance testing thresholds. Additionally, it is clinically recommended for individuals previously diagnosed with COVID-19 to be retested under the following circumstances:

- i. Individuals who were previously diagnosed with COVID-19, and who develop clinically compatible symptoms, should be retested if they are more than 3 months past the date of original infection. If viral RNA is detected by PCR testing, the patient must be isolated and considered to be possibly re-infected. Consult the DPH epidemiologist for guidance.
- ii. Individuals who were previously diagnosed with COVID-19 and who are identified as a close contact of a confirmed case should be retested and subject to quarantine if they are more than 6 months from their date of original infection. It may be appropriate to allow these individuals to quarantine in place.

D. Staff Definition:

For purposes of conducting testing and implementing a surveillance testing program and, in accordance with CMS and CDC guidance, long-term care staff includes: employees, consultants, contractors, volunteers, caregivers who provide care and services to residents on behalf of the facility, and students in the facility's nurse aide training programs or from affiliated academic institutions reporting to the facility during the relevant testing period. For the purposes of a long-term care provider's surveillance testing program, staff does not include: persons who work entirely remotely or off-site, employees on leave, such as paid family medical leave, or staffing provided at the Commonwealth's expense (such as those provided by EOHHS through a clinical rapid response team or the Massachusetts National Guard). Any testing completed by the provider must capture required Department of Public Health information about each staff person including but not limited to gender, age, race, ethnicity, primary city/town of residence, disability, primary language and occupation.

Long-term care providers in Massachusetts are encouraged to monitor the CMS and CDC website for up-to-date information and resources:

- CMS website: <https://www.cms.gov/About-CMS/Agency-Information/Emergency/EPRO/Current-Emergencies/Current-Emergencies-page>
- CDC website: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/healthcare-facilities/index.html>

Additionally, please visit DPH's website that provides up-to-date information on COVID-19 in Massachusetts: <https://www.mass.gov/2019coronavirus>.