March 13, 2020

Dear Community Partners,

As COVID-19 is most likely to cause serious illness in older adults and those with underlying chronic health conditions, it is imperative that your facility take appropriate precautions to prevent the potential spread of this virus. CMS published revised guidance for COVID-19 prevention in nursing homes on March 9, 2020 (Ref: QSO-20-14-NH), and the Van Buren/Cass District Health Department would like to recommend that your facility fully implement this guidance. This includes:

- Actively screen visitors for COVID-19 transmission risk factors and restrict those who meet any of the following criteria:
  - Signs or symptoms of a respiratory infection, such as fever, cough, shortness of breath, or sore throat.
  - In the last 14 days, has had contact with someone with a confirmed diagnosis of COVID-19, or is under investigation for COVID-19, or is ill with respiratory illness.
  - International travel within the last 14 days to countries with sustained community transmission. Visit https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html
  - Residing in a community where community-based spread of COVID-19 is occurring.

- Actively screen facility staff for signs and symptoms of a respiratory infection and ensure that sick individuals are not reporting to work.

- Implement other social distancing measures such as limiting/cancelling group activities and events that bring groups of people together, limiting numbers of residents in dining and other social gathering areas, etc.

Currently, there have not been any identified cases of COVID-19 in Van Buren or Cass County, but the situation across the country and Michigan is rapidly evolving. We are not recommending the restriction of all visitors to facilities that serve older adults (60+) at this time, but asking that careful and diligent actions be taken as noted previously to limit risk to the populations you serve. However, when community spread of COVID-19 starts to occur in Van Buren and/or Cass County, it would be prudent to begin restricting or limiting visitors in alignment with the CMS and CDC guidance.
Enclosed with this letter is an additional document with individual protective measures that people can take to prevent the spread of respiratory illness and more information on COVID-19, as well as a copy of the CMS published revised guidance. Please distribute broadly to your staff and other stakeholders. Additionally, this information and much more can be found on the CDC website at https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/healthcare-facilities/prevent-spread-in-long-term-care-facilities.html and the VBCDHD website at www.vbcassdhd.org. If you have further questions, do not hesitate to contact the Van Buren/Cass District Health Department at 1-269-621-3143.

Kind Regards,

Jeff Elliott
Health Officer
Van Buren/Cass District Health Department
Long Term Care Facilities can follow these guidelines as recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 amongst their residents, staff, and visitors.

**KNOW THE SYMPTOMS OF COVID-19**

- Fever
- Dry Cough
- Shortness of Breath

- Long Term Care Facilities concerned that a resident may be symptomatic of COVID-19 should contact the Van Buren/Cass District Health Dept at 269.621.3143 immediately.

**KEEP RESPIRATORY GERMS FROM COMING INTO YOUR FACILITY**

- **Actively screen and restrict** visitation by those who:
  - Have signs or symptoms of a respiratory infection, such as fever, cough, shortness of breath, or sore throat.
  - Are experiencing respiratory illness or COVID-19 diagnosis or investigation for COVID-19.
  - Have an international travel history within the last 14 days to an area with sustained transmission (see CDC website for information on affected countries).
  - Reside in a community where community-based spread of COVID-19 is occurring.
- If screening is not an option, post signs at the entrance and other doors telling visitors to not visit if they have symptoms of a respiratory infection.
- Ensure sick leave policies **allow and encourage** employees to stay home if they or family members have symptoms of respiratory infection.

**STOP THE SPREAD OF RESPIRATORY GERMS WITHIN YOUR FACILITY**

- Encourage personal protective measures among residents, visitors, and staff, including regular handwashing and covering coughs and sneezes.
- Implement social distancing measures as feasible, such as reducing large gatherings, altering meal schedules to reduce mixing, and limiting programs with external staff.
- Limit visitors to only those who are absolutely necessary and implement screening of visitors for temperature and respiratory symptoms.
- Monitor residents and employees for fever or respiratory symptoms:
  - Restrict residents with fever or acute respiratory symptoms to their room. If they must leave the room for medically necessary procedures, have them wear a facemask.
STOP THE SPREAD OF GERMS, CONTINUED

- Provide the right supplies to ensure ease and correct use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE):
  - Post signs on the door or wall outside of the resident's room that clearly describe the type of precautions needed and required PPE.
  - Make PPE, including facemasks, eye protection, gowns, and gloves available immediately outside of the resident's room.
  - Position a trash can near the exit inside any resident room to make it easy for employees to discard PPE.

PREVENT THE SPREAD OF RESPIRATORY GERMS BETWEEN FACILITIES

- Notify facilities prior to transferring a resident with an acute respiratory illness, including suspected or confirmed COVID-19, to a higher level of care.
- Report any possible COVID-19 illness in residents and employees to the Van Buren/Cass District Health Department at 269.621.3143.

WHAT TO DO NOW

PUT VISITOR LIMITATIONS IN PLACE

- In lieu of visits (either through limiting or discouraging), facilities can consider:
  - Offering alternative means of communication for people who would otherwise visit, such as virtual communications (phone, video-communication, etc.).
- When visitation is necessary or allowable, facilities should make efforts to allow for safe visitation for residents and loved ones. For example:
  - Suggest limiting physical contact with residents and others while in the facility. For example, practice social distances with no hand-shaking or hugging, and remaining six feet apart.
  - If possible, creating dedicated visiting areas (e.g., “clean rooms”) near the entrance to the facility where residents can meet with visitors in a sanitized environment. Facilities should disinfect rooms after each resident-visitor meeting.

DETERMINE ESSENTIAL FUNCTIONS FOR YOUR FACILITY

- Communicate with employees:
  - Ensure they have their own family emergency preparedness plans and have an appropriate supplies of food/water/medications on hand and back-up child care plans in place.
- Review sick leave policy and consider implications of high absenteeism; plan for how operations will continue if there is increasing absenteeism or other interruptions.

QUESTIONS? FIND MORE INFORMATION:

Call: 800.210.1921
Click: www.vbcassdhd.org
Follow: VBCDHD on Facebook