

Dear Nursing Home and Rest Home Colleagues,

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) continue to closely monitor the emergence of respiratory illness caused by a novel coronavirus (COVID-19). There has been one confirmed case in Massachusetts. We reiterate that the risk to Massachusetts residents at this time remains low.

All Massachusetts healthcare facilities should carefully review the current CDC interim infection control recommendations regarding patients/residents who require or may require evaluation for COVID-19 available at the following links: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/hcp/infection-control.html>. The infection control recommendations include the following:

- Minimize the chance for exposure through communication with patients/residents/families, other healthcare facilities, and emergency medical services (EMS) personnel before patient/resident arrival.
- Ensure triage procedures (e.g. signage, travel questions) are in place at the facility point of entry to detect and isolate patients/residents who might require further evaluation for COVID-19. Immediately provide a facemask to these patients/residents, if tolerated.
- Healthcare personnel at risk of exposure to an individual presenting with signs and symptoms and exposure criteria consistent with COVID-19 should also adhere to Standard, Contact, and Airborne Precautions including eye protection (e.g., goggles, face shield, NOTE: glasses are not sufficient for protection).
- Ensure that healthcare personnel are educated, trained, and have practiced the appropriate use of PPE prior to caring for a patient/resident, including attention to correct use of PPE.
- Perform hand hygiene with alcohol-based hand rub (ABHR) before and after all patient/resident contact, contact with potentially infectious material, and before putting on and upon removal of PPE, including gloves. Use soap and water if hands are visibly soiled.

It is important to ensure healthcare facility policies and practices are in place to reduce exposure to respiratory pathogens including 2019-nCoV. While the risk of COVID-19 to Massachusetts residents remains low, the risk for contracting influenza remains high and DPH reminds you there is still time to offer influenza vaccine to residents and staff if they have not already received the influenza vaccine.

To prevent any virus, all individuals are advised to take the following steps:

- Perform hand hygiene frequently;
- Adhere to respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette; and
- Stay home when experiencing symptoms of illness.

Hand hygiene is essential for preventing the spread of infectious organisms in healthcare settings. The attached DPH fact sheet summarizes the recommended use of ABHR in long term care facilities and provides answers to frequently asked questions.

Please visit DPH's new website that provides up-to-date information on COVID-19: <https://www.mass.gov/2019coronavirus>