



March 2, 2020

Dear Family Member,

The 2019 Novel Coronavirus, called COVID-19, is a new respiratory disease first identified in Wuhan, Hebei Province, China in December, 2019. The virus that causes this disease is called severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2, shortened to SARS-CoV-2. As the name indicates, the virus is related to the SARS-associated coronavirus (SARS-CoV) that caused an outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) in 2002-2003, however, it is not the same virus. This particular strain of coronavirus is now called COVID-19.

Public health officials and partners are working hard to identify the source of the COVID-19. Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses, some causing illness in people and others that circulate among animals. Current symptoms reported for patients with COVID-19 have included mild to severe respiratory illness with fever, cough and difficulty breathing.

This virus probably originally emerged from an animal source, but it is now known that the virus can and is being spread from person to person. Some viruses are highly contagious while other viruses are less so. It's not clear yet how easily COVID-19 spreads from person to person. It is likely that it is spread by respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes, similar to influenza and other respiratory viruses.

The first infection with COVID-19 in the United States was reported on January 21, 2020. The first confirmed instance of person-person spread with this virus in the U.S. was reported on January 30, 2020, and the first case of person to person transmission without a known exposure to the virus was reported on February 26, 2020. As of Sunday, March 1, COVID-19 has now been identified in 8 states, including an outbreak in a nursing home in Washington state. By the time you receive this letter, there will be more cases and more states involved. Although there have been no cases identified in New Hampshire to date, March 1, that does not mean that there have not been cases with mild symptoms that did not require medical intervention.

The safety and well-being of our residents, their family members, our employees and our visitors is our highest priority at our facility. We are monitoring the situation with Coronavirus daily and will keep you apprised should the situation evolve into a significant threat.

Our facility has an extensive emergency preparedness plan, which includes a pandemic response plan. The facility pandemic planning committee relies on information from the CDC, World Health Organization, state and local Health Departments in order to protect our residents, staff and visitors. This is a rapidly evolving situation and we continue to revise our response plan accordingly as information becomes available to us.

Daily summary updates are available on the CDC's Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) website.

## Prevention

There is currently no vaccine to prevent coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). The best way to prevent illness is to avoid being exposed to this virus. However, as a reminder, CDC always recommends everyday preventive actions to help prevent the spread of respiratory diseases, including hygiene etiquette. Hygiene etiquette involves practices that prevent the spread of illness and disease. A critical time to practice good hygiene etiquette is when you are sick, especially when coughing or sneezing.

Serious respiratory illnesses like influenza, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), whooping cough and severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and now COVID-19 are spread by:

- Coughing or sneezing;
- Unclean hands;
- Touching your face after touching contaminated objects; and
- Touching objects after contaminating your hands; (virus particles can live on surfaces for several hours, even days depending on the type of virus. It is not yet known how long COVID-19 particles can live on surfaces, but some other coronaviruses have been known to live up to nine days on surfaces)

Measures that may help reduce the risk of you or your family contracting the virus include:

- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, then throw the tissue in the trash – a covered waste basket is preferable;
- If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve, not your hands;
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick;
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth;
- Stay home when you are sick;
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaning spray or bleach-based wipe. Look for products that say they kill coronavirus. It is not yet known if these products kill the COVID-19 form of coronavirus, but CDC tells us to assume these products will be effective at this time;
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom; before eating; after blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing;
  - If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.
  - Always wash hands with soap and water if hands are visibly dirty.
- Follow CDC's recommendations for using a facemask when symptomatic.
  - Please note that the CDC does not recommend that people who are well wear a facemask to protect themselves from respiratory diseases, including COVID-19.
  - Facemasks should be used by people who show symptoms of COVID-19 to help prevent the spread of the disease to others. The use of facemasks is also crucial for healthcare workers.

These are everyday habits that can help prevent the spread of several viruses.

CDC does have specific guidance for travelers. We ask that you let our administration know if you have traveled out of the country within the previous 14 days of your visit to our facility. We may ask you to



take additional precautions during your visit. Because COVID-19 symptoms can mimic symptoms of the common cold or flu, it may be difficult to determine the difference without laboratory testing. For this reason, we also ask that you postpone your visit to our facility if you have any symptoms of a cold or flu. In the event you cannot postpone your visit, please let our nursing staff know that you have cold symptoms so we can provide you with personal protective equipment to decrease the possibility of transmission to your loved one and our other vulnerable residents as well as our staff.

There is no specific antiviral treatment recommended for COVID-19 infection at this time, though testing is being done with antiviral medications and could become available in the near future. People infected with COVID-19 should receive supportive care to help relieve symptoms.

### **Keeping Hands Clean**

Handwashing is one of the best ways to protect yourself and your family from getting sick. Learn when and how you should wash your hands to stay healthy.

Wash Your Hands Often to Stay Healthy.

You can help yourself and your loved ones stay healthy by washing your hands often, especially during these key times when you are likely to get and spread germs:

- Before, during and after preparing food;
- Before eating food;
- Before and after caring for someone at home who is sick with vomiting or diarrhea;
- Before and after treating a cut or wound;
- After using the toilet;
- After blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing;
- After touching an animal, animal feed or animal waste;
- After handling pet food or pet treats; and
- After touching garbage.

### **Follow Five Steps to Wash Your Hands the Right Way**

Washing your hands is easy, and it's one of the most effective ways to prevent the spread of germs. Clean hands can stop germs from spreading from one person to another and throughout an entire community - from your home and workplace to childcare facilities and hospitals.

Follow these five steps every time:

1. Wet your hands with clean, running water (warm or cold), turn off the tap and apply soap;
2. Lather your hands by rubbing them together with the soap. Lather the backs of your hands, between your fingers and under your nails;
3. Scrub your hands for at least 20 seconds. Need a timer? Hum the "Happy Birthday" song from beginning to end twice;
4. Rinse your hands well under clean, running water; and
5. Dry your hands using a clean towel or air dry them.

Use Hand Sanitizer When You Can't Use Soap and Water. Washing hands with soap and water is the best way to get rid of germs in most situations, however, if soap and water are not readily available, you can use an alcohol-based that contains at least 60% alcohol. You can tell if the sanitizer contains at least 60% alcohol by looking at the product label.

Sanitizers can quickly reduce the number of germs on hands in many situations, however:

- Sanitizers do not get rid of all types of germs; and
- Hand sanitizers may not be as effective when hands are visibly dirty or greasy.

The Pandemic Response Plan prepared by our facility was developed to prepare for a worst case scenario, such as if there is large scale community or facility wide COVID-19 illness. We hope that our plan will never have to be implemented but we want to assure you that in the event it becomes necessary, we will activate the plan to protect your loved one, our other residents and our staff.

For that purpose, as part of the plan, we are identifying alternative ways to provide care to our residents should a significant amount of our staff become ill during a community wide epidemic. We may be looking for volunteers or temporary staff willing to become trained to provide some basic care functions, meal service or other services needed such as delivering supplies, should the facility have to self-isolate. If you would be willing to become a volunteer or temporary staff member during such a situation, please contact the Administrator or Director of Nursing so we can add your name to our list.

Please know that we do not expect such drastic measures to be necessary, but we hope you will be reassured to know that we are planning for every possible scenario, just as we plan for every other type of emergency to keep our residents safe.

We are also asking that you provide us with your email address if you have not done so already.

Please contact the Administrator or the Director of Nursing Services if you have any questions, concerns or if you would like clarification of anything in this letter.

Thank you.

Sincerely,



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