

State Will Disclose Nursing Homes with COVID Cases

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Health Care

The state will begin publishing a list of nursing homes in Wisconsin with current confirmed cases of COVID-19, the Wisconsin Health Care Association reported Thursday. The disclosures will begin Monday, May 11, on the Department of Health Services' website.

Also:

- The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services announced Wednesday that it will issue a final rule May 8 requiring COVID-19 reporting to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
- The state provided details of COVID testing in nursing homes.

These are further discussed below.

DHS made the announcement about disclosing confirmed cases in a conference call with nursing home providers Thursday, WHCA reported. WHCA also reported the following details:

The disclosures will include residents and employees, but the state will not identify whether a case involves resident or staff. Nursing homes will be given about 48 hours' notice before the public posting, in which time they can notify residents and families. (As of this writing, DHS had not issued any requirements for such notification.) The state will disclose only whether a facility has a case and will not provide number of cases at a facility.

The disclosures will not include hospitals or assisted living facilities. Nor will it include nursing homes with fewer than 10 residents.

Two provider organizations, WHCA and Leading Age Wisconsin, expressed concerns about such disclosures in a **joint letter Wednesday to Governor Tony Evers and DHS Secretary-Designee Andrea Palm**. The letter raised concerns about singling out nursing homes compared with other industries; privacy violations; shaming of facilities; stress on residents, staff and families; exacerbating difficulties obtaining sufficient staff; and possibly creating disincentives for nursing homes to admit residents who might have COVID.

WHCA and Leading Age also expressed concern about possible nursing home closings without financial relief, saying they have received no additional state funding and very limited federal funding despite a 500% increase in their spending on personal protective equipment and much higher labor costs.

Reporting to CDC

CMS will issue a final rule May 8 requiring nursing homes to report COVID-19 facility data to the CDC and to residents and their families and representatives. Facilities must submit their first set of data by 11:59 p.m. Sunday, May 17.

Nursing homes must electronically report COVID-19 information including:

- Suspected and confirmed COVID-19 infections among residents and staff, including residents previously treated for COVID-19;
- Total deaths and COVID-19 deaths among residents and staff;
- Personal protective equipment and hand hygiene supplies;
- Ventilator capacity and supplies;
- Resident beds and census;
- Access to COVID-19 testing while the resident is in the facility; and
- Staffing shortages.

The information must be provided at least weekly. CDC will post it publicly.

Nursing homes must also inform residents and their families and representatives by 5 p.m. the next calendar day after either a single confirmed infection of COVID-19, or three or more residents or staff with new respiratory symptoms occurring within 72 hours of each other.

Testing

WHCA also reported that, in the conference call with providers Thursday, the state gave details expanding on Monday's announcement of testing for all residents and staff in Wisconsin nursing homes. According to WHCA, state officials said facilities and residents could choose whether to be tested. Exact Sciences laboratories of Madison will supply the test materials and conduct the lab testing. The state is providing the testing at no charge to facilities.

Testing supplies or services can be requested at covid19supplies.wi.gov. This test involves a nasal swab, not the more invasive nasal/pharyngeal test. Results are expected within 48 hours after the swabs are received in Madison.

The first round of testing will not include assisted living facilities.

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