

For Immediate Release
April 24, 2020



Contact: Elizabeth Thomas
ElizabethThomas@hcam.org
517.622.6186

The Health Care Association of Michigan Requests Additional Testing and PPE in Response to Released Numbers of COVID-19 Cases in Nursing Facilities

Additional testing and PPE support critical to continue battling virus as released numbers show

LANSING, Mich. – Today’s COVID-19 information released by the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) shows that Michigan’s skilled nursing facilities are on the front lines of this pandemic and critical partners who need support for increased testing and supplies to stem the spread of this devastating virus, said the Health Care Association of Michigan (HCAM).

The state of Michigan has been particularly hard hit by the virus with more than 35,000 reported cases and more than 3,000 deaths. The average age of those who have succumbed to COVID-19 is 74 years old, and those with underlying conditions are especially vulnerable. These characteristics apply nearly universally to the residents HCAM members serve. The average age of a nursing facility resident in Michigan is 82, often with weakened immune systems and other serious medical conditions.

“These numbers further emphasize our need for Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) and financial support,” said HCAM President/CEO Melissa Samuel. “The availability of PPE is still a challenge and that is unacceptable. Skilled nursing facilities need to be a priority in receiving these life-saving tools.”

Nursing facilities follow all state and federal guidance related to COVID-19 to protect residents and staff. This guidance continues to evolve as more is learned about the virus. These measures have included enhanced infection control protocols, expanded use of PPE such as masks and gowns, restricting visitors, screening staff, and no communal activities.

Despite these – and numerous other – efforts, they have not been able to completely prevent the spread of COVID-19 into facilities. Increased information is now available on an asymptomatic person having the ability to spread the virus to others. This is true not just of facility staff but other residents as well.

“Nearly half of all residents who are testing positive don’t have any symptoms,” said Samuel. “This is one of the reasons providers have been requesting expanded testing, not just for those that are suspected positives but for all residents. Having this additional information is vital to help our staff on the front lines better protect themselves and their residents.”

Facilities continue to take additional steps to not only treat residents infected with COVID-19, but to also prevent the spread to other residents. The loss of even one life to this virus is one too many. These are heartbreaking times for everyone in long-term care.

“The staff at nursing facilities need the state and community’s support,” said Samuel. “They are putting their lives on the line for your family members, your parents and grandparents. In this time of restricted access, the staff is their family. They are stepping up at every level and making tremendous sacrifices to protect those who call our facilities home and to stop the spread of this virus.”

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HCAM is a statewide trade association representing approximately 350 proprietary, not for profit, county medical and hospital-based long-term skilled nursing and rehabilitation facilities.