

UPDATE CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)



Stay informed. Take precautions. Stay safe.

Dear Members,

During the summer months – June through September – assisted living providers in Massachusetts experienced a most welcome decline in the numbers of residents who contracted the COVID-19 virus. Unfortunately, the downward trend of virus transmission witnessed in the summer has given way to an increase in transmission in October. During the summer months, there were roughly one hundred new cases of the virus among ALRs; however, by comparison, there were nearly fifty new cases in the first two weeks of October. These outbreaks have occurred in at least four different residences and appear, in some cases, to be the result of staff-to-staff transmission. EOEA has expressed concern about the increasing number of new cases of the virus and offered some specific infection control reminders, which we are sharing with you here to assist in your infection control efforts.

It is important that ALRs adhere to their established policies and procedures as they relate to preventing transmission among staff. Those policies and procedures were effective, but it is critical that they continue to be followed as strictly as they were in the earlier days of the pandemic. A breach in any policy designed to protect staff and residents may result in exposure and increased risk to everyone. If policies and procedures, which were once effective, are being followed appropriately today, staff-to-staff transmission would not be an issue. In order to refresh staff on these essential measures, all members are encouraged to access our webinar about PPE, Universal Precautions, and Infection Control, which was offered last month and can be accessed [here](#) and used in retraining staff.

As ALRs investigate causes for staff-to-staff transmission, revisit policies, and re-train staff, it is important to note where staff members reside. While the ALR itself may not be in a “COVID-19 Red Zone,” a staff member may actually live in a red zone. The [Stop the Spread Campaign](#) in MA has been extended through December and can be found in 18 of the highest-risk communities (see the link for locations). In these communities, Stop the Spread testing is:

- Open to all Massachusetts residents-not restricted to just residents of the city or town
- Available regardless of whether you have any symptom(s)
- Free unless you are from out of state

[Here is a map](#) that highlights all of the testing sites available in MA, including Stop the Spread and sites for out-of-state residents.

EOEA also is encouraging ALRs to develop new and innovative methods to defend our residents from this current surge in cases. One suggestion is that ALRs assemble in-house, specialty, infection control teams that among other things, can investigate possible sources of infection among staff. Also, ALRs experiencing an increase in infection among staff are encouraged to reach out to ALRs that remain COVID-19-free in order to glean information that will be helpful in minimizing risk among staff.

Additionally, random in-house infection control audits, which can often reveal areas of breakdown of infection control procedures, are often beneficial. For those ALRs that may not have the internal resources to investigate and address these issues or if you have an outbreak in your community, please contact Mass-ALA for the names of companies that will perform infection control audits.

As you evaluate your COVID-19 response in light of the current surge in cases, Mass-ALA has resources that may be helpful. In addition to our ongoing consultation availability, we maintain a library of essential ALR training information. Please go to the Mass-ALA website to access all COVID-19 information developed since the beginning of the pandemic. In particular, [the update](#) highlighting specific steps to take to minimize transmission of the virus was distributed by Mass-ALA in the early weeks of the pandemic and provides detailed information on this topic that may be helpful.

As we enter into the flu season and with COVID-19 posing a threat to the well-being of residents and staff, we acknowledge that battle fatigue is real. This is certainly understandable given the severity and length of this public health threat and adds to our challenges as we once again must step up our efforts in the battle. We believe the staff working in assisted living in Massachusetts are dedicated and continue to be up to this challenge. With the holidays fast approaching, when we know the contact risks will increase, we must remain vigilant in our fight.

Please contact us if you have any questions at, MassALA@mass-ala.org

**The information provided in this COVID 19 update is solely for general informational purposes to assist in understanding the evolving guidance regarding the current COVID 19 public health threat. It is not intended to be a primary public health or medical resource, but is provided as a clearinghouse for or compilation of various guidance issued by official and related sources.*

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