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Department of Health Visits Masonic Village to Highlight Success in Vaccinating Residents and Staff and Updated Visitation Recommendation

ELIZABETHTOWN, PA – Acting Secretary of Health Alison Beam today visited Masonic Villages to highlight the success of vaccination efforts in nursing homes and the measures facilities have taken to support the physical and mental wellbeing of some of Pennsylvania's most vulnerable residents.

The latest measure includes implementing the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) revised [nursing home visitation guidance](#), which the Wolf Administration has been strongly encouraging all nursing homes in Pennsylvania to implement.

"The completion of the Federal Pharmacy Partnership for vaccinations in nursing homes, and the commitment of nursing home staff to follow infection control protocols, have helped to reduce COVID-19 positivity rates and the risk of transmission in nursing homes," Acting Secretary Beam said. "The restrictions on indoor visitation during COVID-19 outbreaks in these facilities over the past year have been extremely difficult for residents, their families and their friends.

"The revised guidance allows for close contact during visitation with fully vaccinated residents, while still following infection prevention principles, and allows visitation during COVID-19 outbreaks in specific scenarios after testing of residents and staff. These measures will provide much-needed relief and hope for Pennsylvanians living in nursing homes, as well as their loved ones."

The CMS guidance states that facilities should allow responsible indoor visitation at all times for all residents, regardless of vaccination status of the resident, or visitor, unless certain scenarios arise that would limit visitation for:

- Unvaccinated residents, if the COVID-19 county positivity rate is greater than 10 percent and less than 70 percent of residents in the facility are fully vaccinated;
- Residents with confirmed COVID-19 infection, whether vaccinated or unvaccinated, until they have met the criteria to discontinue transmission-based precautions; or
- Residents in quarantine, whether vaccinated or unvaccinated, until they have met criteria for release from quarantine.

Additionally, when a new case of COVID-19 among residents or staff is identified, a facility should immediately begin outbreak testing and suspend all visitation (except that required under federal disability rights law), until at least one round of facility-wide testing is completed. The CMS guidance provides the criteria for resumption of visitation following testing.

“Infection control measures are essential to limiting the spread of COVID-19, but the real solution to this pandemic is the COVID-19 vaccine. We are fortunate to have a remarkably effective and safe vaccine that was administered to 96 percent of our residents and over 70 percent of our staff,” Dr. Leigh Ann DeShong, Masonic Village at Elizabethtown medical director said. “These high percentages are a credit to our vaccine education plan. Our goal was to reach each staff member, resident, and family through physician-led town hall meetings that covered all shifts and departments. We have seen the benefit of vaccination first-hand at Masonic Village and in our community, as cases dramatically decline as more people are getting vaccinated. This gives us incredible hope, as we reopen our nursing and personal care areas. We will remain dedicated to our infection control measures, prepared with the knowledge we have gained over this past year.”

The department is pleased to announce that the vaccinations of nursing homes’ residents and staff through the Federal Pharmacy Partnership has been completed. As of March 29, CVS has administered 336,555 doses. As of March 29, Walgreens has administered 57,525 doses of vaccine. All nursing homes in the commonwealth have had at least three vaccine clinics through the Federal Pharmacy Partnership.

The Acting Secretary of Health also recently issued a [new Order](#) requiring all nursing homes to complete a COVID-19 Vaccine Needs Assessment Survey to inform the department’s planning for access to COVID-19 vaccine for all current and future residents and staff following the completion of the Federal Pharmacy Partnership. This survey will provide essential information regarding vaccination uptake and needs in each facility. The department is currently following up with more than 100 facilities that did not complete the initial survey by the due date.

In addition to the above orders and updates, the department has also updated its nursing home guidance to align with the CMS guidance. The updated guidance can be found on the [department’s website](#).

While vaccine supply from the federal government remains limited, the Department of Health is working to ensure the vaccine is provided in a way that is ethical, equitable, and efficient. To keep Pennsylvanians informed about vaccination efforts:

- The [Your Turn](#) tool provides a way to register to be alerted when it’s your turn to be vaccinated.
- A [commonwealth COVID-19 vaccination guide](#) explains the current process for getting one. Pennsylvanians with questions about the vaccination process can call the Department of Health hotline at 1-877-724-3258.
- [Vaccine provider map](#) to find a COVID-19 vaccine provider near you.
- All of the locations that received vaccine and how much they have received can be found on the [COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution webpage](#).
- [Vaccine dashboard data](#) can also be found on the website to find more information on the doses administered and showcase demographic information.
- Pennsylvanians can provide feedback on the Pennsylvania COVID-19 Interim Vaccination Plan by clicking on the Plan Feedback Form square under Popular Vaccine Topics [here](#).
- Frequently asked questions can be found [here](#).

The Wolf Administration stresses the role Pennsylvanians play in helping to reduce the spread of COVID-19:

- Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.
- Cover any coughs or sneezes with your elbow, not your hands.
- Clean surfaces frequently.
- Stay home to avoid spreading COVID-19, especially if you are unwell.
- If you must go out, you are required to wear a mask when in a business or where it is difficult to maintain proper social distancing.
- Download the COVID Alert PA app and make your phone part of the fight. The free app can be found in the [Google Play Store](#) and the [Apple App Store](#) by searching for “covid alert pa”.

Updated Coronavirus Links: Press Releases, State Lab Photos, Graphics

- [Daily COVID-19 Report](#)
- [Press releases regarding coronavirus](#)
- [Latest information on the coronavirus](#)
- [Photos of the state's lab in Exton](#) (for download and use)
- [Coronavirus and preparedness graphics](#) (located at the bottom of the page)
- [Community preparedness and procedures materials](#)

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