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SPECIAL EDITION

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News

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- CMS Offers Comprehensive Support for Oregon due to Wildfires
- Protect Yourself & Your Patients from Flu this Season

News

Independent Nursing Home COVID-19 Commission Findings Validate Unprecedented Federal Response

On September 16, CMS received the final report from the independent Coronavirus Commission for Safety and Quality in Nursing Homes (Commission), which was facilitated by MITRE. CMS also released an overview of the robust public health actions the agency has taken to date to combat the spread of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) in nursing homes. The Commission's findings align with the actions the Trump Administration and CMS have taken to contain the spread of the virus and to safeguard nursing home residents from the ongoing threat of the COVID-19 pandemic. This announcement delivers on the Administration's commitments to keeping nursing home residents safe and to transparency for the American people in the face of this unprecedented pandemic.

"The Trump Administration's effort to protect the uniquely vulnerable residents of nursing homes from COVID-19 is nothing short of unprecedented," said CMS Administrator Seema Verma. "In tasking a contractor to convene this independent Commission comprised of a broad range of experts and stakeholders, President Trump sought to refine our approach still further as we continue to battle the virus in the months to come. Its findings represent both an invaluable action plan for the future and a resounding vindication of our overall approach to date. We are grateful for the Commission's important contribution."

As the capstone to the Commission's extensive report, on September 17, Administrator Verma will join Vice President Mike Pence and CDC Director Dr. Robert R. Redfield, some members of the Commission, and other public health and elder care experts at the White House. The Vice President, Dr. Redfield, and Administrator Verma will lead the group in a discussion regarding the Commission's findings and general issues facing the nation's elder care system.

Nursing homes and other shared or congregate living facilities have been severely affected by COVID-19, as these facilities often house older individuals who suffer from multiple medical conditions, making them particularly susceptible to complications from the virus. To help CMS inform immediate and future actions as well as identify opportunities for improvement, the Commission was created to conduct an independent review and comprehensive assessments of confronting COVID-19. The Commission's report contains best practices that emphasize and reinforce CMS strategies and initiatives to ensure nursing home residents are protected from COVID-19.

As outlined in the overview released on September 16, the Trump Administration has already taken significant steps to implement many of the Commission's findings. The Administration has worked to support nursing homes financially during this challenging time, distributing over \$21 billion to America's nursing homes – more than \$1.5 million each on average. To ensure nursing homes had access to supplies, the Trump Administration shipped a 14-day supply of personal protective equipment to more than 15,000 nursing homes across the Nation in May.

The Administration has also required facilities to report data about COVID-19 cases, deaths, and supply levels, with 99.3 percent of facilities currently reporting. CMS took action to keep COVID-19 out of nursing homes by requiring them to test staff, a requirement that was paired with the Administration's distribution of 13,850 point-of-care testing devices to America's nursing homes. The Administration has also deployed federal Task Force Strike Teams in six waves, in 18 states so far, to 61 facilities particularly affected by COVID-19 to share best practices and gain a deeper understanding of how the virus spreads. CMS also required states to conduct focused infection control inspections at their nursing homes; between June and July, states completed these inspections at 99.8 percent of Medicare and Medicaid certified nursing homes.

Additionally, since March, CMS has conducted weekly calls with nursing homes, issued over 22 guidance documents and established a National Nursing Home COVID-19 Training program focused on infection control and best practices. CMS is also using COVID-19 data to target support to the highest risk nursing homes. In May, CMS released a new toolkit developed to aid nursing homes, Governors, states, departments of health, and other agencies who provide oversight and assistance to nursing homes. The toolkit is a catalogue of resources dedicated to addressing the specific challenges facing nursing homes as they combat COVID-19. CMS updates the toolkit on a biweekly basis.

For More Information:

- [Coronavirus Commission for Safety and Quality in Nursing Homes Report](#)
- [Trump Administration Response to Commission findings](#)
- [COVID-19 Guidance and Updates for Nursing Homes during COVID-19](#)

See the full text of this excerpted [CMS Press Release](#) (issued September 16), including a list of CMS public health actions for nursing homes on COVID-19 to date.

CMS Offers Comprehensive Support for Oregon due to Wildfires

On September 17, CMS announced efforts underway to support Oregon in response to wildfires across the state. On September 16, HHS Secretary Alex Azar declared a Public Health Emergency (PHE) in Oregon, retroactive to September 8. CMS is working to ensure hospitals and other facilities can continue operations and provide access to care despite the effects of the wildfires. CMS provided numerous waivers to health care providers during the current Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic to meet the needs of beneficiaries and providers. These [waivers](#) will continue be available to health care providers to use for the duration of the COVID-19 PHE and for the wildfires PHEs. CMS will be waiving certain Medicare, Medicaid, and Children's Health Insurance Program requirements; creating special enrollment opportunities for individuals to access health care quickly; and taking steps to ensure dialysis patients obtain critical life-saving services.

For More Information, visit www.cms.gov/emergency. See the full text of this excerpted [CMS Press Release](#) (issued September 17).

Protect Yourself & Your Patients from Flu this Season

Do your part to prevent the spread of seasonal flu. The CDC published [flu vaccine recommendations](#) for the 2020-2021 season. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, reducing the spread of respiratory illness, like flu, this fall and winter is more important than ever.

Frequency and Coverage:

- Medicare Part B covers one flu shot per flu season and additional flu shots if medically necessary

- Flu shots are free for your Medicare patients if you accept assignment

You can give pneumonia and flu shots during the same office visit; see [CDC recommendations](#).

The [CDC](#), the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, and the Healthcare Infection Control Practices Advisory Committee recommend that all U.S. health care workers get annual flu shots.

For More Information:

- [CMS Flu Shot](#) webpage
- [CDC Flu](#) website
- [CDC Information for Health Professionals](#) webpage
- [CDC Fight Flu Toolkit](#) webpage
- [Vaccines.gov](#)

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