



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Health & Hospital Corporation, American Senior Communities continue to focus on residents, employees and family members

Organizations reaffirm commitment to proactive communication, testing and transparency

INDIANAPOLIS – As long term care facilities nationwide continue to feel the devastating impact of COVID-19, the Health & Hospital Corporation of Marion County (HHC) and American Senior Communities (ASC) have remained focused on the organizations' top priority – the health and safety of residents and employees.

Given the unprecedented critical needs of residents, HHC and ASC are aggressively implementing best practices for clinical care and infection control, conducting comprehensive testing and providing daily, proactive communication to residents, their designated representatives and employees.

"During this horrific pandemic, we remain focused on the health, safety and well-being of our residents, their families and our staff," said HHC President & CEO Matthew Gutwein. "We focus on the people most vulnerable to this terrible virus, our residents, many of whom are already susceptible to severe illness. We focus on our remarkable employees, who risk their lives and the lives of their loved ones to care for and protect our residents. We also focus on our residents' families and understand this is an extraordinarily difficult time for them."

Going beyond CDC and ISDH guidelines

From the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic, HHC and ASC have sought to be ahead of the curve, implementing safety and infection control procedures prior to guidelines issued by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the Indiana State Department of Health (ISDH). HHC and ASC continue to go beyond CDC and ISDH recommendations for clinical care:

- Testing 100% of all residents in facilities where there is reason to believe a resident or staff member has contracted the virus.
- Testing 100% of residents in high-risk facilities where there are no known cases of the virus.
- Restricting visitors at all facilities.
- Retesting residents who were COVID-19 positive to ensure proper care.
- Screening each resident for illness daily.
- Screening and taking the temperature of all staff, clinical partners, vendors and all others as they enter our communities.
- Requiring all staff to wear PPE at all times.
- Cancellation of large group activities.
- Exercising best practices for infection control.
- Quarantining and cohorting residents and staff who are COVID-19 positive.
- Requiring all residents to wear masks if they are able to tolerate it while outside of their room, and in their room when a staff member or visitor is present.

“Residents in nursing and assisted living facilities are especially vulnerable to the coronavirus,” said ASC CEO Donna Kelsey. “Until a vaccine is developed, the only way a person can avoid contracting the coronavirus is through social distancing and sheltering in place. However, residents in nursing facilities cannot engage in social distancing or shelter in place. Every day, by necessity, staff and other partners must come into a nursing facility to provide care to residents and to operate the facility. Even with methodical screening prior to each shift or visit, there is an inherent risk of introducing the coronavirus because so many people continue to pass the virus asymptotically.”

Comprehensive testing

HHC and ASC are partnering with the community to address the heightened needs of residents, families and staff caused by the pandemic. Uniquely and early on, HHC and ASC created its own testing strike team, which includes nurses from ASC and Eskenazi Health. The organizations are collaborating with the IU Health Lab, which is providing test kits and rapidly reading the results. This strategy enhances HHC’s and ASC’s ability to quickly identify positive cases and implement isolation protocols. Early detection of the virus is imperative to reducing the exposure risk to other residents and to staff.

As additional testing became available, HHC and ASC began – and continue – to test 100% of residents in any facilities where there is reason to suspect a resident or staff member may be COVID-19 positive. HHC and ASC are testing 100% of residents in facilities located in high-risk regions, even those with no known COVID-19 contact. This includes Marion County, where 100% of our residents have been tested.

Devastating impact of COVID-19

Long term care communities conducting extensive testing may report higher numbers of COVID-19 positive cases than other communities that do not prioritize testing or have access to tests.

“The situation remains serious. We are deeply saddened whenever a resident or staff member becomes infected, and we grieve for each resident who has passed away,” said Kelsey. “As residents begin to recover, ASC remains steadfast in protecting and continuing to serve them. Right now, the majority of our communities are free of COVID-19, and we are deeply committed to doing our very best to keep this virus out of those facilities. We are also grateful for our dedicated employees. I am in awe of the deep commitment and compassion they bring every day. They are truly heroes.”

HHC and ASC partner to operate 78 skilled nursing facilities and five assisted living facilities across Indiana. The following data is current as of May 18, 2020:

- Long term care residents: 6,959
- Total COVID-19 tests completed: 6,060
- Residents currently COVID-19 positive: 621
- Residents recovered from COVID-19: 285
- Resident deaths from COVID-19: 246
- Facility employees: 10,287
- Facility employees currently COVID-19 positive: 134
- Facility employees recovered from COVID-19: 233
- Additional staff hired since the pandemic began: 745

Engaging residents and their families in care

To ensure daily, real-time communication, HHC and ASC have assigned a staff person at each facility to serve as the primary contact for residents and their designated representatives. This staff person is

available to residents or their designated representatives who want to discuss any questions or concerns. Each facility has a secondary phone number as well, which serves as a customer service hotline in case a family member is unable to reach the facility's primary contact.

Each resident, designated resident representative and staff member is informed daily of the total number of COVID-19 cases at the facility and the number of new cases in the last 72 hours. If applicable, the facility's staff will also communicate if there have been three or more new cases of respiratory illness at the facility within the last 72 hours. More information, including the number of deaths at a facility, is provided if the resident, their designated representative or staff would like to know. These communications adhere to ISDH guidance issued on May 4, 2020.

Additionally, ASC and HHC are now making this information available on their websites so that family members and care partners have another means to access this data. Each facility maintains a dashboard on its webpage with comprehensive data along with important information about COVID-19 and clinical measures implemented to protect residents. [HHC is including aggregate data on its website](#), as well as links to all HHC-owned facilities.

HHC and ASC also encourage residents, their designated representative and other family members to contact the local government-appointed Long Term Care (LTC) Ombudsman to ask questions, express concerns or share experiences. Anyone may contact their local LTC Ombudsman if they feel they are unsuccessful in reaching facility staff or are not being heard.

"This pandemic has brought grief, loss and tremendous sadness to thousands of families across the country," said Gutwein. "Residents of long term care facilities have been the hardest hit, and we cannot express the level of devastation felt by each and every passing. We can, however, commit to doing everything in our power to protect as many people as possible, and that's what we're doing."

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