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Insights

Nursing Homes Required to Test All Staff Members for COVID-19

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As we previously reported, with case counts accumulating amongst the vulnerable patient population in nursing homes, the Indiana State Department of Health ("ISDH") has mandated that all nursing home ("facility") staff must undergo testing for COVID-19, free of charge, during the period of June 15, 2020 through June 30, 2020. In follow-up to this mandate, the ISDH issued a newsletter setting forth additional instructions for testing, which are described in part herein.

Each facility must take specific steps to support the mandatory statewide testing of all staff members, including direct patient care providers, administrative employees, contracted workers, and others that enter the facility on a regular basis. The only exceptions are staff members that have already tested during the month of June 2020, and any member previously diagnosed with COVID-19 through the use of a viral test. A prior diagnosis obtained via serology testing will require additional testing.

Since the tests are not optional, each facility is required to put forth a good faith effort to obtain tests of all staff members and are discouraged from accepting or facilitating noncompliance. In the event that a member of the staff refuses testing, the facility should question and document that member's determination, and warn the member that their refusal may be reported to the ISDH.

Each facility should make concerted efforts to verify and enter accurate data for all tested employees, which will facilitate the process of contact tracing. This includes identifying the specific facility that the employee works at.

The test kits will be delivered to all facilities, so each individual employee must register for testing at www.lhi.care. Otherwise, they will not receive a test kit. The facility must then store the test specimens in the coolers that are provided with the test kits. The coolers should have ice inside, but the specimens should not be in direct contact with the ice. The specimens will be picked up by OptumHealth, and the ISDH will subsequently pick up the coolers for use at a different facility.

Notably, the test kit delivery appointments are determined by the ISDH, cannot be rescheduled, and the facility will only have twenty-four (24) hours to complete the testing process. It is important for the facility to confirm that all staff are available for testing during that time frame. If that is not possible, the facility will bear the responsibility of testing the unavailable staff members or directing them to an OptumHealth site for testing.

Don't delay in preparing for your facility's testing process, as the deadline for completion is June 30, 2020. This process will provide insight into the number of asymptomatic COVID-19 positive staff members currently working in nursing homes and will be utilized in developing future guidelines for testing.

Please contact Meghan M. Linvill McNab or J. Cody O’Neil for assistance in navigating this urgent testing process.