

Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services
COVID-19 Call with Nurses
July 23, 2020
3:00 p.m. ET

OPERATOR: This is Conference # 7971869.

Alina Czekai: Good afternoon. Thank you for joining our July 23 CMS COVID-19 Call with Nurses. This is Alina Czekai leading stakeholder engagement on COVID-19 in the Office of CMS Administrator Seema Verma.

As always, CMS appreciates the care that nurses have provided to patients throughout the public health emergency. We know that many of your institutions are resuming in-person care delivery, and we want you to know that CMS is committed to providing information to health care systems, providers, and facilities on an ongoing basis. As we learn more, we will continue to update our guidance and recommendations.

Today, we have a rather light agenda. We'll be discussing only updates from the agency and there's no guest speaker presentation. So, hopefully, we can give you all some very valuable time back.

As always, if you have any questions for the agency, or if you have any best practices that you would like to share with the group on a future call, you can always reach us with any questions or recommendations at our COVID-19 mailbox which is COVID-19@cms.hhs.gov.

In terms of updates from the agency, CMS continues to work to address challenges related to COVID-19 for nursing homes. Yesterday, CMS announced several new initiatives designed to protect nursing home residents from COVID-19.

First, we are issuing new funding. HHS is devoting \$5 billion as a provider relief fund authorized by the CARES Act to Medicare-certified long-term care facilities and state veterans' homes to build nursing home skills and enhance

nursing homes' responses to COVID-19, including enhanced infection control.

And this funding could be used to address critical needs in nursing homes including hiring additional staff, implementing infection control mentorship program with subject matter experts, increasing testing, and providing additional services such as technology so that residents can connect with their family members and friends if they are not able to visit in person.

In regards to enhanced testing, HHS is building on the initiative that was announced last week in which rapid point of care diagnostic testing devices will be distributed to nursing homes, and the new funding from the provider relief fund CMS will begin requiring rather than recommending that all nursing homes in states with a 5 percent positivity rate or greater test all nursing home staff each week.

In regards to additional technical assistance and support, we are deploying a federal task force strike team to provide onsite technical assistance and education to nursing homes experiencing outbreaks in an effort to help reduce transmissions and the risk of COVID-19 to spread among residents.

The task force strike teams are composed of clinicians and public health service officials from CMS, the CDC, and the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health or OASH. The task force strike teams went into nursing homes based on data they reported to the CDC that indicated an increase in COVID-19 cases. The teams focused on the four key areas of support including keeping COVID-19 out of facilities, detecting COVID-19 cases quickly, preventing virus transmission, and managing staff.

Finally, in regards to weekly data on high-risk nursing homes, since May, CMS and CDC began collecting weekly data on each nursing home including the number of COVID-19 cases. Now that this data collection process has matured, the White House and CMS will release a list of nursing homes with an increase in cases that will be sent to states each week as part of the weekly governor's report to ensure that states have the information needed to target their support to the highest-risk nursing homes.

This concludes our update from the agency. Operator, we're happy to take any questions from the line. Thank you.

Operator: That is noted. And, ladies and gentlemen, we are about to start the question-and-answer session. To ask a question, you will need to press star one on your telephone keypad. To withdraw your question, press the pound key. If your line is not transcribed yet, I will identify you with the last four digits of your phone number. Please stand by while we compile the Q&A roster.

Once again, ladies and gentlemen, if you would like to ask a question, that's star one on your telephone keypad. Again, that's star one on your telephone keypad.

We don't have a question in queue. Presenter, please continue.

Alina Czekai: Great. Thank you. And thank you, everyone, for joining our brief call today. We hope that you will join us for our CMS COVID-19 Office Hours that'll take place next Tuesday, July 28, at 5:00 p.m. Eastern for technical question-and-answer session with our CMS subject matter experts.

Again, we really appreciate all that you are doing for patients and their families around the country as we continue to address COVID-19 as a nation. This concludes today's call. Have a great rest of your day.

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