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**Crisis Communications Response Tools- 3/20/20**

***Communications Checklist:***

**Prior to an incident:**

* **Update contact lists for all Staff, Patient/Residents Family Members and Local Media**. Have this information saved/stored both digitally and in print in a safe/secure place (to protect personal information) that can be accessed quickly by only those who need it in the event of an emergency.
  + **For Staff:** Include Name, Title/Position, Home Mailing Address, Phone Number (Home and Cell), Email (Work and Home), Emergency Contact Name, Relation and Phone Number.
  + **For Patient/Residents Family Members:** Include Resident Name, Family Contact Name, Relationship, Home Mailing Address, Phone Number (Home and Cell) and Email (if available)
  + **For Local Media:** Include Reporter Name, Media Outlet Name, Media Outlet Type (TV, Radio, Newspaper), Phone Number and Email.
    - To find newspaper contacts: <https://inanews.com/find-iowa-newspaper/>
    - To find tv/radio contacts: <http://iowabroadcasters.com/aws/IBA/pt/sp/station-directory>
* **Create message templates and save/store templates with contact list information.** See sample templates included in this toolkit and customize for your organization.
* **Assign communications tasks to designated staff.** Make sure those staff know what they are expected to do/communicate if an incident occurs. Also make sure ALL staff know who will be responsible for these communications.

**If an incident has occurred, implement communications in the following order:**

* Iowa Department of Public Health – Report incident by calling:

**During Business Hours: 800-362-2736  
After Business Hours Only: 515-323-4360 (This will take you to the State Patrol dispatch who will notify the state epidemiologist.)**

* Local Health Department – Report incident if it occurs within jurisdiction of local health department. To find your local health department contact, visit: <https://idph.iowa.gov/lphs/local-public-health-agencies>
* Family Members - Notify family members of patients/residents who have been confirmed as infected with COVID-19, as well as family members of all other patient/residents. **(see template examples)**
* Iowa Department of Inspection and Appeal – Notify them of a positive test through the compliant incident hotline: 1-877-686-0027.
* Iowa Health Care Association – Email [info@iowahealthcare.org](mailto:info@iowahealthcare.org) with the name of your facility, town, key contact, phone number and number of positive COVID-19 cases (if known).
* All Employees – Follow your pandemic emergency response procedures to engage staff response team.
* Media – Prepare statement to have for local media requests. **(see template examples)**

***Communications Templates:***

Customize templates for your organization and follow HIPAA guidelines.

**In all communications, it is imperative to follow HIPAA protocols.** The following templates bear that in mind. Essentially the only thing that should be communicated to residents, families or the media about the person who was positive is that there has been a positive case in the building and then the discussion should change to focus to what you are doing to keep them safe (example isolating residents with positive cases, giving them separate staff, infection control practices). It is incredibly critical that the communication be calm, clear, and cognizant of HIPAA obligations.

**TALKING POINTS FOR FAMILY MEMBERS**

**FOR FAMILY OF PATIENTS/RESIDENTS CONFIRMED COVID-19 POSITIVE**

* Follow [Health Information Privacy Guidelines](https://www.hhs.gov/hipaa/for-professionals/faq/487/may-a-hospital-notify-a-patients-family-that-the-patient-is-at-their-facility/index.html) and your organization’s protocols for family member notifications.
* Where the patient is present, or otherwise available prior to the disclosure, and has the capacity to make health care decisions, you may notify family and the other persons if the patient agrees, or when given the opportunity, does not object. You may also notify the family or other persons if it can be reasonably inferred from the circumstances, based on professional judgement, that the patient does not object.

**FOR FAMILY OF PATIENTS/RESIDENTS NOT COVID-19 POSITIVE - SHORT VERSION**

“<Organization name> has (#) of (residents/staff) were confirmed with COVID-19 on (date) and are receiving medical treatment. They will remain in isolation for at least 14 days.>

Please know that the health and safety of your loved one is our top priority. We are doing everything we can to ensure we stop the spread of this within our facility and to protect your loved one. We are working with local and state health officials to ensure we are taking the appropriate steps at this time. Our staff and residents are following the recommended actions and procedures to eradicate this infection. **<Insert here the additional specific steps your organization is taking related to infection control in response to this.>**

We have also implemented the following ways you can easily and safely communicate with your loved ones during this time. <Insert alternative communications methods available.>

Should you have any questions or concerns, please contact us directly at (phone number).”

**FOR FAMILY OF PATIENTS/RESIDENTS NOT COVID-19 POSITIVE - LONG VERSION**

**\*\*Template Letter for Family Members on Center Letterhead\*\***

**\*\*For Facilities Impacted By COVID-19\*\***

**\*\*Please Tailor as Needed\*\***

To Our Residents and Family Members:

I want to inform you that I have received confirmation that [# of individual(s)] at [Facility Name] has/have been diagnosed with COVID-19. [This/these individual(s) is/are] receiving medical treatment and will remain in isolation for at least 14 days.

Please know that the health and safety of your loved one is my team’s top priority. I am working with my team to ensure we are doing everything we can to stop the spread of COVID-19 within **[Facility Name] and to protect your loved one.** We are working with local and state health officials to ensure we are taking all the appropriate steps and have activated our emergency response procedures, which includes [insert organization specific measures in place.] Our safety measures also include limiting visitors to prevent additional spread of infection to your loved one and others.

I have also worked with my team to implement the following ways you can easily and safely communicate with your loved ones during this time. I encourage you to call our center at **[Facility Phone Number]** for updates on the status of your loved one. I understand that you are concerned about your loved one, and that is why it is crucial that we restrict visitation to reduce the spread of this virus. I also understand that connecting with your family member is incredibly important. I encourage you to connect with your loved one through Skype, calling, texting or other social media formats, such as [insert organization’s social media platform addresses if applicable].

My team will contact you [insert time frame for when they can expect to receive communication] if your loved one is suspected or diagnosed with COVID-19. I want you to know that we are taking every precaution to prevent the spread of infection. I also know that you may have questions, and I encourage you to contact our center.

We also need your help in battling COVID-19. Please visit the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html) to learn how you can help prevent the spread in our community.

I know this is a difficult time for everyone. I will continue to provide you with updates as they become available. Please know that I and my team are strictly adhering to all directions from the local and state health department.

If you have questions, please contact our center at [**Facility Phone Number**]. I know that you may have questions, and I encourage you to contact our center.

Sincerely,

[Facility Administrator Name - First Name and Last]

[Facility Name]

**MEDIA STATEMENTS**

**FOR CASES OF POSITIVE COVID-19 CONFIRMED**

“<Organization name> has (#) of (residents/staff) were confirmed with COVID-19 at organization name in (city/town) on (date) and are receiving medical treatment. They will remain in isolation for at least 14 days.>

We are in contact with their family</ies> and are doing everything they can to support them. We are also doing everything we can to ensure we stop the spread of this within our facility and have activated our emergency response procedures. We are working with local and state health officials to ensure we are taking the appropriate steps at this time. Our staff and residents are following the recommended preventative actions, we have restricted visitors from entering our facility, and cancelled all group activities within the building until the virus has been eradicated.”

**FOR CASES RESULTING IN DEATH(S) DUE TO COVID-19**

“On behalf of the <Organization Name>, I am deeply saddened to report the death of (#) of (residents/staff) at (organization name) in (city/town) on (date) due to COVID-19.

We are in contact with their family</ies> and are doing everything they can to support them. We are also doing everything we can to ensure we stop the spread of this within our facility. We are working with local and state health officials to ensure we are taking the appropriate steps at this time. Our staff and residents are following the recommended preventative actions, we have restricted visitors from entering our facility, and cancelled all group activities within the building until the virus has been eradicated.”

**MEDIA TALKING POINTS**

* We can confirm <#residents/staff> <confirmed with/deaths from> COVID-19.
* We are in constant contact with the impacted families and doing all we can to support them.
* Resident safety is a top priority for [FACILITY NAME].
* [FACILITY NAME] is in close contact with our local and state health departments, as well as the CDC, to stay up to date on the information and take necessary actions to prevent and manage the spread of COVID-19.

***DEPENDING ON THE LOCAL HEALTH DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATIONS, you may also note:***

* We are restricting all non-essential personnel, per direction from local health department (as well as the federal/state government).
* Family members with questions about their loved ones can contact us at (phone).
* Family members can also interact with their loved ones by using video chat, calling, texting or checking in on social media. [OUTLINE HOW FACILITY IS FACILITATING COMMUNICATION]

***ANSWERS TO COMMON MEDIA QUESTIONS, you may receive:***

* Should families who are worried move their loved ones out of skilled nursing centers or assisted living communities?
  + No. Moving the elderly or frail is risky and often has long-lasting impacts. Research around natural disasters and other emergency events has proven this over time. CDC does not currently recommend transferring residents either home or to the hospital.
* How concerned are you for skilled nursing center or assisted living residents?
  + We know that the frail and elderly are especially susceptible to this virus. That’s why we are in close communication with our local health department, CDC and CMS to ensure we have the latest information and resources available.
* Are you having trouble getting things like masks and gowns?
  + We have heard that some long-term care providers are having some of the same difficulties as other health care providers getting masks and gowns. In our facility, we [PROVIDE INFO ON YOUR SUPPLIES (e.g., conservation efforts)].
  + [CUSTOMIZE BASED ON YOUR SITUATION: We [have reached/are reaching] out to the state and local health departments and area hospitals/other health care providers when we are unable to place orders for equipment we need.]
  + It’s important to remind the public that the CDC does not recommend masks for the general public at this point, so we can prioritize this equipment for health care workers. We also urge members of the public to not hoard hand sanitizer, so we can make that available to residents and staff, who need to use it regularly.
* If staff have to stay home because they are sick/schools close, how are you ensuring that there are enough staff to care for your residents?
  + Our state and national associations are encouraging both federal and state governments to waive current licensing requirements that would hinder care professionals from working across state lines, so we can potentially address any shortages due to employees needing to stay home.
  + Our state and national associations are also advocating for priority testing for our employees and residents, so we can quickly identify whether staff need to remain at home or if they can come back to work.
  + [PROVIDE STEPS FACILITY IS TAKING]

***Additional Communications Resources:***

[IHCA Public Health Reporting Obligations Guidance](https://www.iowahealthcare.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/10/2020/03/Public-Health-Reporting-Obligations-Updated031320.pdf)

[IHCA Public Health Reporting FAQs](https://www.iowahealthcare.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/10/2020/03/Frequently-Asked-Questions-Reporting-Requirements-1.pdf)

[AHCA Emergency Preparedness Requires a Communications Plan](https://www.ahcancal.org/facility_operations/disaster_planning/Documents/EP%20Comm%20and%20Media%20Plan.pdf)

[AHCA Sample Template Press Statement and Talking Points for Impacted Facilities](https://www.ahcancal.org/facility_operations/disaster_planning/Documents/Infection%20Control%20Statement_Talking%20Points%20for%20Facilities%20With%20Coronavirus.docx)

[AHCA Sample Template Press Statement and Talking Points for Non-Impacted Facilities](https://www.ahcancal.org/facility_operations/disaster_planning/Documents/Infection%20Control%20Statement_Talking%20Points%20for%20Facilities%20Without%20Coronavirus.docx)

[IHCA Media Statement Regarding New Federal Government Long-Term Care Visitation Guidance for COVID-19](https://www.iowahealthcare.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/10/2020/03/IHCACoronavirusMediaStatement-031420-FINAL.pdf)

[IHCA Media Statement Regarding COVID-19 and Long-Term Care Visitation Guidance](https://www.iowahealthcare.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/10/2020/03/IHCACoronavirusMediaStatement-031120FINAL.pdf)

[IHCA Media Guidance for Members](https://www.iowahealthcare.org/ihca-media-guidance-for-members/) (requires login)

[AHCA Notice to Families Restricting Visitors](https://www.iowahealthcare.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/10/2020/03/Notice-to-Families-Restricting-Visitors-4.docx)

[AHCA Sample Letter Templates to Employees](https://cl.exct.net/?qs=f1da12c0c0d31ff92c855f179893beb08f7d16e0faf8164415ad824e9e0164e2c16da28ef5234c2ba592d0b5636e62a1f8b5969989e7c005)

[AHCA Sample Letter Templates to Residents & Family Members](https://cl.exct.net/?qs=50137f25c9e1be378430648a2ec4f55da26c0d3dcf13a137fb0252c0fd81275c8dd26ffed2b605860c50fa8c4a439ac3dba4694bc89ab9a6)

[CDC Communication Resources – Fact Sheets, Handouts, Posters, etc. Ready to Print](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/communication/factsheets.html)

[CMS Emergency Preparedness Rule](https://www.liveprocess.com/blog-cms-communication-plan-emergency-preparedness-rule)

[US Department of Health and Human Services Health Information Privacy](https://www.hhs.gov/hipaa/for-professionals/faq/487/may-a-hospital-notify-a-patients-family-that-the-patient-is-at-their-facility/index.html)

[US National Library of Medicine – Breaking the bad news to a bereaved family](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3777373/)