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## **Iowa Health Care Association urges continued caution to protect Iowa's long-term care residents**

*'COVID-19 vaccine is on the horizon, but we're not out of the woods yet'*

Iowa nursing facility staff and residents will see first doses of the COVID-19 vaccine arriving as soon as Dec. 28, now that the U.S. Food and Drug Administration has approved Pfizer's request for emergency use authorization (EUA) and vaccine shipments are arriving in Iowa. However, that does not mean it is yet safe to visit loved ones in Iowa nursing homes this holiday season.

"The coming delivery of this vaccine to our long-term care residents and staff is welcome news. This has been a brutal year for our state's elderly and those with pre-existing medical conditions who reside in long-term care settings. The vaccine is our best defense in protecting them and finding our way back to normal," said Brent Willett, president and CEO of the Iowa Health Care Association (IHCA), an organization that works with Iowa's long-term care providers. "A COVID-19 vaccine is on the horizon, but we are not out of the woods yet. Given the two-dose administration process for the vaccine, the durability of the immunity produced by the vaccine for our nursing home residents and staff will not be known until March at the earliest."

The vaccine requires two doses be administered before it becomes fully effective, with a waiting period between doses of 21 days. The vaccine is being distributed to Iowa's 430 nursing facilities through the federal LTC Pharmacy Partnership Program. The program utilizes three federally approved pharmacies to distribute and administer the vaccine: Community Pharmacy, CVS and Walgreens. The pharmacies are scheduling clinics across the state to deliver and administer the vaccine to the more than 25,500 nursing facility employees and over 19,000 residents. The first of these clinics for long-term care will begin the week of Dec. 28. It will take three to four weeks to administer the first dose to Iowa nursing facility residents and staff. The administration of the second dose is anticipated to begin Feb. 2 and run through early March.

In the meantime, the IHCA urges continued caution during the winter holidays to protect Iowa's long-term care residents and staff. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) safety guidelines recommend that older individuals and those with medical conditions that put them at increased risk of severe illness from COVID-19 avoid in person gatherings with people not in their household. For long-term care residents, this means people who live outside of the facility where they reside. In addition, visitation protocols for nursing homes are defined by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) and current guidelines do not allow for in person visits to nursing facilities when a county's COVID-19 positivity rate is higher than 10%, except in certain compassionate care scenarios.

"We know this has been an incredibly difficult year for Iowa families, but there is a light on the horizon. We can reach it if we remain disciplined and diligent. We have come too far and lost too many loved ones to let our guard down now," added Willett. "This holiday season, the best thing you can do for your loved ones in long-term care is follow the recommended safety guidelines. This year make a phone call or send a card to share your holiday

wishes. If we all do our part this holiday to keep the virus from spreading and give the vaccine time to do its work, we can protect the safety of our Iowa seniors and look forward to brighter days ahead.”

**About the Iowa Health Care Association**

The Iowa Health Care Association (IHCA), along with its affiliates the Iowa Center for Assisted Living (ICAL) and Iowa Center for Home Care (IHC), is an integrated statewide association serving organizations that provide post-acute health care to improve the lives of Iowans, including nursing facilities, assisted living, residential care, senior living communities and home health agencies.

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