August 20, 2020

To All of Our Families,

I regret to report that our testing of residents and staff this week has uncovered one more resident with COVID-19. I received this test result earlier today. The test results are reported to us on a rolling basis and we have 48 of 66 test results back – all negative with the exception of one. We have not had any new positives among staff.

The family has been notified, and we are ensuring that their loved one receives the best possible care. This resident is not symptomatic and did not have a roommate, limiting exposure to other residents. Following the protocol laid out in our pandemic response plan, the positive resident is now isolated on our COVID-specific unit, which has its own designated staff and nursing station as part of our containment strategy.

I am sure that receiving such updates from me is concerning. All of us here at ERRC want to assure you that we continue to do all we can to protect your loved one and are working closely with the state Department of Health on our response plan.

These positive results are made more difficult by the fact that this latest development pushes back any plans to re-open for visitation for 28 days, or longer if there are any additional positives. While we all recognize how important visitation is for residents, families and staff, this measure is necessary to slow the transmission of the virus.

For the positive residents presently at ERRC, I can share with you that they are each in stable condition, as are our staff members who are at home on mandatory quarantine recovering from COVID.

Meanwhile, these employee quarantines, as well as new vacancies we are working to fill, are creating some staffing challenges. While we continue to meet the recommended staffing levels to care for our residents, I wanted you to be aware of this new development and I will continue to include updates as part of my messages to you.

Lastly, I will note that another round of testing of all residents will take place next week; our routine weekly testing of staff continues as well.
I include a summary below my signature of the measures we have taken to protect residents and staff (this is similar to the information I share weekly). Any questions you may have about your individual family member’s care and safety may be addressed to the nurse manager on your unit.

Stockade/3S: 518-347-5480
Mohawk/3W: 518-347-5808
Edison/2S: 518-382-2166
Supervisor phone (after hours): 518-912-4861

As always, you may also email any questions to ERRCQandA@ellismedicine.org

I recognize how incredibly difficult this crisis has been for all of you, as anxieties are heightened by this news of another positive test result. I do want you to know that the health and safety of your loved ones will always be our highest priority, and we are doing all we can to protect their health and wellbeing. I promise to keep you updated with any new developments.

Sincerely,

Aimee Rathka, MSHSA, LNHA
Administrator
Ellis Residential and Rehabilitation Center

**ERRC's General Weekly Updates**

- Gov. Cuomo has extended his executive order that mandates testing of nursing home staff across New York State. Under this order, ERRC staff will continue to be tested through next month, and longer if the governor extends the executive order again.
- COVID-19 testing is taking place at the McClellan Street Health Center campus for surgical, obstetrics and other Ellis patients. This testing is contained in the parking lot outside. There is no access to the interior areas of the building, ensuring the safety of our residents.
- We were notified that the Ombudsman Office is still available to residents and families. If you need to contact the Ombudsman office, please feel free to contact Claudette Royal at 518.473.8718 or via email at claudette.royal@aging.ny.gov.
- If you receive personal belongings of your loved one from the facility, there is a possibility that when items are returned, they may be handled without PPE. Given that much is unknown about this virus, it is hard to reliably predict how long virus may remain infectious on contaminated surfaces. Therefore, family members should be cautioned to wait at least 7 days before unpacking items from bags and boxes.
New and ongoing measures taken to protect the residents and staff from COVID-19

- We have ceased accepting new admissions until further notice.
- All staff members pass through two checkpoints daily for symptom assessment and temperature checks.
- All staff must wear gowns, gloves, masks and face shields when in the nursing units unless in a non-resident area (e.g. office space). Masks and gowns are changed as per the CDC recommendations.
- Tracking of staff and residents is implemented as appropriate, so that we can readily identify exposure links.
- Telehealth options are being utilized to reduce the need for residents to leave the facility, thus decreasing potential exposures.
- There are no non-essential staff allowed on the units.
- Recreation programs are being conducted either on a one-to-one basis, by using "hallway programming" and ZOOM recreation programming on the Chromebooks.
- Infection control policies and procedures are reviewed frequently to ensure compliance with state and federal requirements, as well as to ensure they remain inclusive of best practices.
- Testing of staff occurs once weekly. Results are reported to the CDC, Department of Health, and Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services on a required schedule.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Will ERRC tell us if there is a new case or suspected case within the nursing home?
A: Yes, we alert residents, families and staff whenever we have a positive or suspected case among employees and residents. We will respect HIPPA protections and no resident information is shared, but we notify the appropriate people in a timely manner.

Q: How will changes be communicated?
A: Email communications will be sent weekly, or more often if the situation warrants. We have also held video conferences and will schedule additional video conferences as needed.

Q: Are you experiencing any additional staffing shortages related to COVID-19?
A: We continue to meet the recommended staffing levels to care for our residents; however, we have had some challenges with staff on quarantine and with vacancies.

Q: Can staff wear cloth masks if donated?
A: Although we greatly appreciate the efforts, unfortunately at this time the Department of Health does not support the use of cloth masks in nursing homes.

Q: What can families do to support the ERRC staff?
A: We’ve all been touched by the community’s outpouring of support recognizing the great sacrifices staff are all making. If anyone wants to contribute - whether it's supplies, or a meal for our amazing staff - please contact Beth Frear in The Foundation for Ellis Medicine at FrearE@ellismedicine.org. Please indicate that you wish to have your donation support the Ellis Residential and Rehabilitation Center.

Q: Has anyone been confirmed with COVID-19 since the last communication?
A: We have communicated with you all positive test results among our staff and residents. As noted above, we now have had four positive cases among residents to date, and one death. We have had eight staff positives since the pandemic began. If any additional residents or staff receive a positive diagnosis of COVID-19, we will continue to notify families within 12 hours; if these guidelines for notification change, we will let you know as soon as the change becomes effective.

Q: Is testing available for ERRC residents?
A: Yes. We will be conducting another round of testing of all residents the week of Aug. 24.

Q: Are there any changes in the staffing patterns?
A: We have had some changes in staffing patterns due to mandatory staff quarantines and vacancies we have yet to fill. However, we continue to meet the recommended staffing levels to care for our residents. Our staff have remained resilient in the face of uncertainty. We cannot thank them enough for their hard work and dedication.

Q: How are you monitoring staff for appropriate infection control practices?
A: We conduct frequent audits of infection control practices, and our management staff have ongoing conversations with staff regarding the importance of compliance.

Submit questions to the Department of Health at icp@health.ny.gov or covidnursinghomeinfo@health.ny.gov.