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PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICES COMMUNICABLE DISEASE CONTROL

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To All Owners and Staff of Congregate Living Facilities,

2019 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) illness is currently widespread in Orange County, and this outbreak is anticipated to continue for weeks to months. COVID-19 can cause severe illness at all ages, but particularly in the elderly. Outbreaks among elderly residents of congregate living facilities, including skilled nursing facilities, assisted living facilities and other smaller group homes, have been seen around the country, and have routinely resulted in multiple hospitalizations and deaths.

The Orange County Health Care Agency (OCHCA) is committed to assisting with COVID-19 testing of residents and their caregivers in congregate living facilities.

Any congregate living facility resident who develops fever and cough should be tested for COVID-19. Prompt diagnosis of COVID-19 allows those infected to receive the early care they need and helps prevent spread in a facility. Facilities should call the residents' medical provider or the OCHCA Communicable Disease Control Division at 714-834-8180 to discuss testing of any symptomatic residents.

All persons who care for the elderly in any setting should stop working immediately if they develop fever and cough. Any symptomatic caregiver should contact their occupational health program or medical provider to discuss the potential need for COVID-19 testing.

OCHCA recognizes the critical role that caregivers for the elderly play. We want to assure that caregivers who have COVID-19 are identified and that those who do not have COVID-19 are able to return to work quickly. If there aren't other options for testing, the caregiver's medical provider can call us at 714-834-8180 to schedule an appointment. OCHCA testing is only performed by appointment after discussion with the medical provider.

Caregivers who are not tested should adhere to CDC guidance for healthcare workers with confirmed disease. This includes isolation at home until at least seven days after symptom onset and at least 72 hours after fever resolves and symptoms improve. Caregivers who return to work after seven days must wear a mask at work until at least 14 days after illness starts and until all symptoms resolve. This CDC guidance can be found at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/healthcare-facilities/hcp-return-work.html>.

There are additional measures that facilities should take to limit the spread of COVID-19 into their facility. Facilities should implement a protocol for at least daily monitoring for acute respiratory illness among residents and staff. Visitors should be prohibited from entering the facility unless essential. Group activities, including communal dining, should be suspended. Additional California Department of Public Health recommendations can be found at <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CHCQ/LCP/Pages/AFL-20-25-1.aspx>.

Please feel free to contact us with any questions at 714-834-8180.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Matt Zahn'.

Matt Zahn, MD
Medical Director
Communicable Disease Control Division