NC DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

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Division of Public Health

November 2, 2022

To: North Carolina Long-Term Care Facilities
From: Zack Moore, MD, MPH, State Epidemiologist
Re: COVID-19 – Preparations for Winter Surge

Dear colleagues,

COVID-19 activity is expected to increase over the coming weeks and months as we head into winter and as more transmissible subvariants continue to emerge. Ensuring that all long-term care residents have access to vaccination and to treatment if needed is critical to prevent illnesses and deaths. NC DHHS urges all long-term care facilities and provider to protect your residents and staff by taking the actions outlined in this memo.

Bivalent COVID-19 Boosters

As you are aware, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that all adults receive a bivalent COVID-19 booster vaccine. Bivalent boosters protect against the original COVID-19 virus strain as well as more transmissible and immune-evading BA.4 and BA.5 strains of the Omicron variant, restoring protection that has waned since previous vaccination. As a result, monovalent mRNA COVID-19 vaccines are no longer authorized as booster doses for individuals 5 years of age and older.

Adults over the age of 65 remain our most vulnerable population, and should receive a bivalent booster (when eligible) for protection against the omicron variant of COVID-19.

As a long-term care provider, we are reminding you that the bivalent booster should be readily accessible to patients in your care. If you are not actively providing or partnering with a physician who is providing these vaccines, DHHS has the following options:

Option 1: Self Service - Find a Vaccine Provider

- Visit Long-Term Care Facilities | NC COVID-19 (ncdhhs.gov)
- Navigate to “Finding a Vaccine Partner for Booster Doses”
- Access the list of providers via excel or pdf format
- Identify providers in your county that may be able to support
- Contact these providers directly (based on the information provided) to find a partner

Option 2: Request assistance finding a Vaccine Provider

- If you are unable to find a provider, please contact Lauren Krueger at Lauren.Krueger@dhhs.nc.gov. NCDHHS may be able to assist with matching your facility to a Vaccine Provider Partner.

Antiviral Treatment

Treatments are widely available for patients across the state of North Carolina. Research shows that treatments work by lowering the risk of hospitalization and death but are most effective if started within 5–7 days of symptom onset. A partnering provider should evaluate a patient for eligibility as soon as possible when they test positive for COVID-19.

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) COVID-19 Treatment Guidelines Panel recommends one of the following treatment options for non-hospitalized adults with mild to moderate COVID-19 who are at high risk of disease progression:

- Preferred Therapies (listed in order of preference):
  - Nirmatrelvir/ritonavir (Paxlovid)
  - Remdesivir (Veklury)
- Alternative Therapies, *for use ONLY when neither of the preferred therapies are available, feasible to use, or clinically appropriate* (listed in alphabetical order):
  - Bebtelovimab
  - Molnupiravir (Lagevrio)

The Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) for Paxlovid now allows state-licensed pharmacists to prescribe Paxlovid under certain conditions. This may be a convenient option for individuals seeking treatment who are able to provide a complete patient record to the pharmacist. For more information about how pharmacists can prescribe Paxlovid, please refer to this FDA Press release.

To find a provider offering COVID-19 treatment or more information about the treatments themselves, please visit our NC DHHS COVID-19 Treatments webpage.

Prevention

Robust infection prevention practices are the backbone for preventing the spread of disease, including respiratory viruses. Our Regional Infection Prevention Support (RIPS) Teams exist to strengthen infection prevention capacity through training, education, and consultation in long-term care settings, particularly those facility types that do not have trained medical staff. These teams operate under the direction of the NC Division of Public Health and in consultation with the NC Statewide Program for Infection Control and Epidemiology, providing the most current recommendations for practice. If you have infection prevention questions or would like to schedule an assessment, please reach out to Caroline Colburn @ caroline.colburn@dhhs.nc.gov to connect you with the team in your region.

Thank you for your continued partnership in the fight against COVID-19!