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March 6, 2020

TO: Administrators of nursing homes, assisted living residences, comprehensive personal care homes, residential health care facilities and dementia care homes

FROM: Marcela Ospina Maziarz, MPA 
Deputy Commissioner
Health Systems

SUBJECT: Required Outbreak Response Plan

This memorandum is a reminder that pursuant to N.J.S.A. 2H-12.87 ("Act") long-term care facilities, defined in the Act as nursing homes, assisted living residences, comprehensive personal care homes, residential health care facilities and dementia care homes are required to have an outbreak response plan ("Plan"). The Act took effect on August 15, 2019 and gave facilities until February 11, 2020 to develop the Plan. The Plan, which is to be customized to the Facility, based upon national standards and be developed in consultation with the Facility's infection control committee (if the facility has one) is to be available to DOH staff upon an inspection of a long-term care facility.

DOH is providing the following guidance to ensure that your facility's Plan addresses the requirements of the Act. Each of the points checked in No. 2 in the guidance below must be addressed in the Plan.

1. DEFINITIONS

"Cohorting" means the practice of grouping patients who are or are not colonized or infected with the same organism to confine their care to one area and prevent contact with other patients.

"Endemic level" means the usual level of given disease in a geographic area.

"Isolating" means the process of separating sick, contagious persons from those who are not sick.

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"Long-term care facility" means a nursing home, assisted living residence, comprehensive personal care home, residential health care facility, or dementia care home licensed pursuant to P.L.1971, c.136 (C.26:2H-1 et seq.).

"Outbreak" means any unusual occurrence of disease or any disease above background or endemic levels.

2. OUTBREAK RESPONSE PLAN

The filed Plan shall cover the following:

- ✓ A protocol for isolating and cohorting infected and at-risk patients in the event of an outbreak of a contagious disease until the cessation of the outbreak;
- ✓ Clear policies for the notification of residents, residents' families, visitors, and staff in the event of an outbreak of a contagious disease at a facility;
- ✓ Information on the availability of laboratory testing, protocols for assessing whether facility visitors are ill, protocols to require ill staff to not present at the facility for work duties, and processes for implementing evidence-based outbreak response measures;
- ✓ Policies to conduct routine monitoring of residents and staff to quickly identify signs of a communicable disease that could develop into an outbreak; and
- ✓ Policies for reporting outbreaks to public health officials in accordance with applicable laws and regulations.