

AHCA/NCAL COVID-19 Increase In Positive Testing Messaging

- Long term care providers have been calling for increased access to testing since the earliest days of the pandemic. Only recently have these calls been heeded.
- On April 27, the federal government announced that long term care residents with symptoms are now in the highest priority level for testing.
- Some states and localities have gone a step further by implementing facility-wide testing of all long term care communities.
- We applaud this additional step. In fact, some nursing homes and assisted living communities have already taken this step proactively.
- As nursing homes and assisted living communities are able to ramp up testing, positive cases of COVID-19 will likely rise.
- While an increase in positive cases may be startling, it will improve our ability to confront this threat and protect our residents.
- Only through broader testing can facilities isolate all those who are infected and quickly determine where resources should be allocated to better protect both caregivers and residents.
- Up until now, lack of adequate and timely testing has forced providers to rely on a symptoms-based approach. This has complicated efforts to prevent the spread of COVID-19 since many people who have the virus can spread it without showing symptoms.
- According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 57 percent of elderly who tested positive for COVID-19 did not have symptoms, but spread virus at levels that likely made them infectious to others.
- While more testing likely means more positive cases in the near term, ultimately it will improve our ability to protect our residents and limit the spread of the virus.
- And the data shows that the vast majority of cases will ultimately recover.
- Rather than being discouraged by more known cases, we are encouraged that access to testing is improving our ability to respond to this threat and will enable us to protect our residents and staff in a more targeted way moving forward.

Q&A on Increased Positive Testing

Q: Does the increase in positive tests mean the virus is spreading more rapidly?

A: The increase in positive tests means we have a firmer grasp on the number of cases in our facilities and improves our ability to limit the spread moving forward. Since so many people remain asymptomatic, we cannot rely on symptomatic testing if we are going to stop the spread in a communal living environment.

Q: Should residents and their families be concerned to see the number of cases rising?

A: While an increase in positive cases may be startling, residents and their families should know that this will improve our ability to confront this threat and protect those in our care. Only through broader testing can facilities isolate all those who are infected and quickly determine where resources should be allocated to better protect both caregivers and residents.

Q: Since the number of positive cases is rising, does it also mean that the number of fatalities is going to rise?

A: It is important to remember that the vast majority of people who test positive ultimately recover, even among one of the most vulnerable populations living in nursing homes and assisted living communities. As testing expands, the number of positive cases will likely rise, but it will ultimately improve our ability to limit the spread through isolation and other targeted measures. This will save lives.

Q: Do long term care providers support broader testing of all residents and staff?

A: Yes. We have been calling for this for some time and are encouraged that more and more state and local governments are helping long term care providers test everyone in their facilities. We hope this will soon be universal across the country so that all facilities can respond to this threat in a more targeted way.

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