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Department of Health Highlights May 2021 Nursing Home Inspection, Sanction Information Amidst COVID-19 Pandemic

Harrisburg, PA – In its [May 2021 report](#), the Pennsylvania Department of Health notes that nursing home surveyors conducted 456 inspections, including 293 complaint investigations, of 322 separate nursing homes. Of these inspections, 76 were COVID-19-specific investigations. There were four new [sanctions](#) finalized against nursing care facilities in the past month resulting in a total of \$142,850 in fines.

“As COVID-19 remains a threat in our communities, we continue to work with nursing home staff and residents to ensure they have access to one of the three safe and effective vaccines that provide protection against this virus,” Acting Secretary of Health Alison Beam said. “It is essential that everyone remain vigilant regarding the potential spread of COVID-19 in nursing homes. We continue to stay vigilant to best protect residents.”

Individuals can file complaints about a nursing home with the department in several ways: anonymously by calling 1-800-254-5164, filling out the [online complaint form](#), emailing c-ncomplai@pa.gov, or sending the complaint [in the mail](#) to the department.

The inspections include information on nursing home patient care and building inspections. If a facility is cited for not following [regulations](#) during the survey, it must submit a plan of correction that includes what will be done to fix the issue(s) and a completion date for the resolution. The department will conduct a surprise follow-up inspection to ensure issues are resolved. Surveys are posted to the website 41 days after the survey is completed.

The Department of Health also conducts surveys on behalf of the Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services (CMS). These surveys include federal certification and recertification, complaint surveys, building safety surveys and others.

The department also may issue [sanctions](#) that could include a civil penalty, a ban on admissions, a license being revoked, or a facility being put on a provisional license, which requires, among other things, being subject to additional inspections. A provisional license can be renewed no more than three times. The department can return the facility to a regular license if it is satisfied that all issues have been corrected and it is warranted.

The department maintains a [searchable database](#), which allows the public to view patient care surveys, building safety surveys, size of the nursing home, type of ownership and additional information about each of the nursing homes in the state. The

department oversees 692 nursing homes with more than 88,000 beds in Pennsylvania, in addition to other facilities, including hospitals, ambulatory surgical facilities, home care agencies and others.

The Wolf Administration has taken a three-pillar approach to protecting the vulnerable residents living in nursing homes and other long-term care facilities (LTCF) from COVID-19:

- Ensuring resident safety through testing, education, and resources;
- Preventing and mitigating outbreaks; and
- Working in partnership with state agencies, local health departments and long-term care facility operators.

While the COVID-19 vaccine is not mandatory, it is strongly encouraged to protect against outbreaks. Following the vaccination clinics offered through the [Federal Pharmacy Partnership](#), the department shared a [LTCF vaccine strategy](#) to ensure all residents and staff continue to have access to the vaccine. As of April 1, 2021, the statewide average skilled nursing facility vaccination rate for residents is 80 percent and for staff is 52 percent. You can find this reported vaccine data on our [LTCF Vaccine Strategy website](#). Additionally, per CMS's May 11, 2021 memo [QSO-21-19-NH](#), all Skilled Nursing Facilities are required to report staff and resident COVID-19 vaccination data to the National Healthcare Safety Network (NHSN) by 11:59p.m. on June 13, 2021. You can find the link to this newly reported data on the Department's [LTCF Vaccine Strategy page](#).

While residents and staff at skilled nursing facilities are receiving vaccine, it is essential that everyone remain vigilant regarding the potential spread of COVID-19 in congregate care facilities. Data regarding LTCF cases can be found on the department's [LTCF data page](#).

More information regarding case information for all nursing homes, guidance provided to nursing homes, the orders in place, fact sheets and frequently asked questions documents to assist in regard to what is being done by the state to assist nursing homes can be found on the department's [COVID-19 nursing home page](#).

You can find the latest guidance on nursing home visitations [here](#).

The Department of Health is working to ensure the vaccine is provided in a way that is ethical, equitable, and efficient to all Pennsylvanians:

- All Pennsylvanians age 12 and older are eligible to receive a free COVID-19 vaccine. Use [Vaccine Finder](#) to find a COVID-19 vaccine provider near you.
- A [commonwealth COVID-19 vaccination guide](#) explains the current process for getting one. Pennsylvanians with questions about the vaccination process can call the Department of Health hotline at 1-877-724-3258.

- The [Unite Against COVID Weekly Update](#) is a round-up of news you can use and answers to your most pressing vaccine questions – delivered directly to your inbox every week.
- Frequently asked questions can be found [here](#).

The Wolf Administration stresses the role Pennsylvanians play in helping to reduce the spread of COVID-19:

- Get vaccinated with one of the three safe and effective vaccines available to provide the best layer of protection.
- Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.
- Cover any coughs or sneezes with your elbow, not your hands.
- Clean surfaces frequently.
- Stay home to avoid spreading COVID-19, especially if you are unwell.
- If you must go out, you are required to wear a mask when in a business or where it is difficult to maintain proper social distancing. Fully vaccinated people are allowed to participate in [some activities](#) without a mask.
- Download the COVID Alert PA app and make your phone part of the fight. The free app can be found in the [Google Play Store](#) and the [Apple App Store](#) by searching for “covid alert pa”.