

COVID-19 Communications Tips

As you continue to take the precautionary steps to reduce the risk of COVID-19 in your communities, it is important to consistently engage in timely communication with staff, residents and their loved ones no is more important now than ever. Here are some tips to consider communicating before and after COVID-19 cases are detected in your communities:

Before a case is confirmed

- **Be proactive.** Have a communications team in place that is prepared to keep residents, family members and staff apprised of changes.
- **Communicate prevention.** Repeatedly share what you are doing to prevent possible COVID-19 cases at your community including reduced or restricted visitation policies, visitor screening protocols, enhanced disinfection routines and anything that goes above and beyond what currently is required.
- **Communicate the process.** Ensure your staff members know what the process is for screening and reporting symptoms in themselves and residents.
- **Monitor news, social media and health officials.** Keep tabs on public sentiment and any potential cases at nearby locations or facilities. Learn from the good and bad of how other providers have handled this situation.
- **Have a plan for quarantine.** Make sure you have a plan in place if a quarantine becomes necessary. Beyond having that plan (which may be a variation of an emergency or pandemic plan), share it with your staff members so they are in the know.
- **Draft statement language now.** While you have the luxury of time, draft a variety of approved statements. This will give you time to focus on the last-minute specifics when you are bombarded by media inquiries.

After a case is confirmed

- **Communicate quickly and transparently.** Time is not on your side. A timely disclosure of facts to residents, family, staff members and the public is critical.
- **Be consistent.** Providing regular updates fosters open communication with your community. Recognize that communications must be ongoing and updated as new information comes to light.
- **Cooperate with the media and be sensitive to deadlines.** “No comment” is not a good comment. Designate one media spokesperson, and prepare talking points that reiterate the information you want to convey.
- **Communicate first to staff, residents and family.** Those affected by the situation need to be the first to know. They need to hear from you first. Ensure that there is a seamless and immediate way for these groups to receive information.
- **Assume everything is public.** Know that any internal memo to staff or residents can, and likely will, get into the hands of the media. Treat all information as though it were public, not private. Be consistent.
- **Respond to all inquiries on social media.** While time-consuming, it is crucial to dispel misinformation and show that your organization is responsive and transparent.

For communications support or questions about responding to media inquiries, contact Shayna Varner, Director of Communications, at svarner@phca.org.