

# Pennsylvanias New COVID-19 Testing Directive for Long-Term Care Facilities

PUBLISHED ON  
**May 18, 2020**

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Pennsylvania has joined other states in increasing its COVID-19 testing recommendations for residents and staff of its long-term care facilities.

According to a recent Pennsylvania Department of Health alert, the state is implementing a new testing strategy for earlier detection of infected residents and staff. The department is directing facilities to develop a facility-wide testing and mitigation plan. Once detected, residents and staff who test positive for COVID-19 must be segregated or excluded from the larger community.

Pennsylvania is among the states with the largest number of vulnerable seniors. While serious outbreaks of COVID-19 have occurred in many facilities despite best efforts, some outbreaks have caused Pennsylvania Attorney General Josh Shapiro to initiate criminal investigations.

This new directive responds to growing concerns that without more testing, the state cannot slow the spread of the COVID-19 virus in the facilities. In many states, including Pennsylvania, seniors account for more than one-third of the all fatalities from COVID-19.

The new testing directive applies to all residents and staff, and is in addition to existing infection prevention and control measures, including restrictions on visitors, dining and group activities.

Given the limitations of testing resources, the health department is proposing that facilities prioritize their testing. Those facilities with confirmed or suspected cases of COVID-19 are directed to implement regular testing and retesting of all residents and staff. At facilities with no confirmed cases, the department is proposing that facilities test 20% of residents and staff weekly.

Many facilities have raised concerns that current testing resources simply are not sufficient to support the state's testing initiative. The state has acknowledged these limitations in the alert, stating "the large scope of the pandemic will require facilities to use their own resources to obtain testing results more rapidly." If commercial labs are not available, or if not able to return results quickly, the state is offering the use of its own labs. However, the concern remains that the state's resources soon may be overwhelmed.

Still, help may be on the way. The Pennsylvania Senate passed a bill last week that would allocate \$500 million of COVID-19 relief to the state's long-term care facilities. The bill awaits approval from the House, and it is unclear whether the relief package will include the resources needed for wide-spread testing.

So far, the state's new testing directive is not a legal mandate. Nevertheless, long-term care facilities should adhere to the new testing recommendations to the extent possible, since the state already has initiated investigations of those

facilities that fail to adhere to its COVID-19 standards. Facilities should begin to implement the state's testing strategy with the expectation that additional guidance and financial support may be coming soon.

If you have any questions about the new testing directive, please [contact me](#) or any member of the [Barley Snyder Senior Living Industry Group](#).

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