



October 23, 2020

Message to Duncaster Residents and Families

Michael A. O'Brien, President and CEO

The news this week regarding COVID-19 was discouraging. With cases soaring and hospitalizations peaking across much of the country the experts tell us we are entering a “dangerous new phase” of the pandemic. Unfortunately here in Connecticut the positivity rates for COVID are also increasing. As of this week, the Department of Public Health is now posting on their website, ct.gov/coronavirus, a weekly update on the positivity rates in each town in Connecticut. The towns are color coded gray, yellow, orange and red based on the number of positive cases per 100,000 population. At this time, the town of Bloomfield is coded orange with 35 cases reported at an 11.7 positivity rate per 100,000 population. Hartford, which is one of the towns in the red has a positivity rate of 19.4 per 100,000 population. There is a total of 19 towns in the red at this time, with New London and surrounding towns seeing the most of the cases.

We are closely monitoring the updates from DPH, CMS and CDC as changes may result in modification to our testing strategy, an important containment strategy for COVID-19.

Testing Update

Caleb Hitchcock Health Center. At Caleb Hitchcock Health Center, testing from week of October 12th resulted in one staff member testing positive. We are therefore testing all staff and residents weekly at this time.

Main Building-All Staff and Assisted Living Residents.

At the Main Building and Dogwood, we have been testing all our staff as well as Assisted Living residents weekly now for a period of 2 consecutive weeks due to an outbreak of a kitchen staff testing positive. I am happy to report that all staff and residents have tested negative. As we have achieved the 14 day of no positive mandate, we will stop the weekly testing for residents and go to monthly surveillance testing in the month of November.

Independent Living Residents. All IL residents tested on the 13th of this month tested negative.

At this time we are planning a November testing schedule which will be made available next week. Going forward, we are being advised that we may need to reduce the frequency of when we test IL residents as Hartford HealthCare is now receiving a series of insurance denials for testing asymptomatic residents. More information will be forthcoming.

An issue of concern for us that we have been addressing with the Connecticut Department of Public Health is the length to time it now takes to get results. We use Hartford HealthCare as our partner for testing and they in turn use Quest lab to process the specimens. The length of time the results take is dependent on how many samples the lab receives in that week. Unfortunately this is not something that we or Hartford HealthCare can control. As you know, with the numbers rising, more tests are being done and Quest lab has been taking longer for

the results to be available. The Connecticut Department of Public Health is committed to addressing this issue which is statewide.

In addition, we were notified today that as a result of the increased incidence of COVID-19, the Connecticut Department of Public Health is now requiring weekly staff testing for all nursing homes, assisted living service agencies and manage residential communities effective November 1st until further notice. If a facility is experiencing an outbreak, defined as at least one new facility-onset case of COVID-19 among residents or at least one new case of COVID-19 among staff, the facility should test all staff and residents weekly. If there is no new facility-onset cases among COVID-19 among staff or residents for approximately 14 days, weekly residents testing may stop, however, weekly staff testing shall continue.

Vaccine update

We have heard from CDC and DPH regarding their draft plan for vaccination. CDC has partnered with CVS and Walgreens to provide wrap around vaccination services to higher risk population including Skilled Nursing, Assisted Living and Independent Living which has been classified as a priority group. It is supposed to be a 3-phase approach to vaccination based on supply availability. There are a lot of unknowns and more questions than answers related to vaccinations such as time frame, FDA approval, safety etc. We are keeping a close track of this and will share with you more as more information becomes available.

Dining

We had tentatively set the date of October 26th to slowly reopen the dining rooms. In preparation for a safe reopening the Dining Team has been engaged in very thoughtful and detailed planning and training. We also held five forums with residents to review safety procedures and plans for reopening, to seek input from residents, and to gauge the level of resident interest in returning to the dining rooms. In addition, we listened very carefully to our dining staff.

While I know that everyone, staff and residents, anxiously await the reopening of our dining rooms I also sensed the hesitation and concern. Therefore, based upon the resurgence of COVID-19 in Connecticut and the Greater Hartford area, feedback from residents and staff, and conversations with my peers, I have decided that the risk of reopening of the dining room on October 26th is too great and consequently not in the best interest of everyone's health and well-being at this time. We will continue to monitor the situation with the goal of reopening our dining rooms when our community feels it can be done safely with minimal risk.

We will continue with room service with an increased focus on accuracy of delivery, improved phone customer service and expanded menu options. In addition, we will work with the Resident's Dining Committee and use our resources to create some new dining experiences including the opportunity to pick up meals at the servery for those who would be interested.

Travel Advisory

The state's Travel Advisory directs all travelers to self-quarantine for a 14-day period when entering or returning to Connecticut from one of the identified states. As of October 20, 2020, the following 40 locations meet the criteria and are included in Connecticut's travel advisory. They are:

Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Guam, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Puerto Rico, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Virginia, West Virginia, Wisconsin, Wyoming.

This list will continue to be updated on a weekly basis as the situation develops across the country. Please remember that the Connecticut Department of Public Health recommends that you should quarantine for a 14-day period if you have been in direct contact with someone who has traveled from one of the above states or outside of the US or if you have traveled outside of the US.

In other news

We are working with the clinic and their patient experience team to enhance the experience of our residents with the clinic. They are currently conducting a survey of our residents and some of you may have already received a call from this team to get your feedback. If you have an interest in providing your feedback, please reach out to Ami Desai, Vice President–Health Services/Administrator at ext. 2399 and she will be happy to have them contact you. We really want to hear from you so that we can take this opportunity for the clinic to provide the best services for our residents. Dr. Kurtakoti is committed to making this happen. We will share results and plans with residents as soon as it is available. Also if you have not received your flu shot, please contact the clinic to schedule a time to receive it.

In closing, Dr. Deirdre Gifford, Acting Commissioner of the Connecticut Department of Public Health, urged CT residents to “buckle down” on public health measures such as masking, social distancing and avoiding gatherings when possible. She emphasized that these measures will help to prevent the spike we saw in March and April and that now is the time to take action. Let’s continue to keep everyone at Duncaster healthy and safe, practicing excellent infection control practices including masking, hand hygiene and distancing. As a caring community let’s use our emotional and intellectual well-being and pandemic stamina to successfully cope during this tumultuous time.

Be safe, be well.