



Wednesday, November 25, 2020

Dear Residents,

I'd like to update you on the status of our COVID outbreak in Penrose Harbor skilled nursing. I've received good questions from residents that many of you might be wondering about so I will include those answers in this update. It will be a rather long read, but hopefully informative.

We have completed testing of all Heron's Key and Penrose Staff members, all residents of Penrose Harbor skilled nursing, assisted living and memory care and any independent living residents that had a known exposure. We have identified one additional skilled nursing resident with a positive result. The total case count is 10: 6 skilled nursing residents, 2 staff members and 2 independent living residents.

Confidentiality

Many of you have been concerned about the positive cases in independent living. Of course we must protect the privacy of our friends and neighbors, but I can share that all cases we have identified have been tied to skilled nursing in Penrose Harbor. There have been no cases identified in assisted living, memory care or the remaining independent living population.

Source

Some of you have asked about the source of the infection. We will likely not be able to determine the source as it had to have been an asymptomatic carrier. We screen all staff entering Penrose Harbor every shift for any symptoms of COVID. We also screen all approved visitors and health care providers entering the building. In addition, we screen all residents every shift including temperature, oxygen levels, and respiration.

There are several ways an asymptomatic carrier could have entered Penrose Harbor. It could have been a patient admitted from a hospital; many hospitals have been experiencing outbreaks in the past month. We request a negative COVID test prior to admission and then place the newly admitting patient on quarantine for 14 days. Quarantine reduces risk of transmission, but does not eliminate it. The incubation period for COVID-19 is 2 to 14 days. It's possible for someone to come from the hospital with a negative test and not have had enough of the virus develop in their system to produce a positive test at the time of admission.

The second way for COVID to infiltrate skilled nursing would be through an asymptomatic staff member. Of course, all of our staff have done an amazing job of following precautions both inside and outside of work. Our almost COVID free status (one case in August in a staff member) nine months into this pandemic is a testament to their commitment to safety.

A third way is for an approved visitor who was asymptomatic and therefore not detected by the screening process. Although visitors have been very restricted, the Safe Start Plan for Long Term Care does allow one essential person to visit when someone is on hospice or is unable to participate in any other form of visitation.

A fourth way is a health care provider who enters Penrose Harbor and is an asymptomatic carrier, again, not detected by the screening process. Most encounters with outside health care providers have been completed using electronic technology and virtual visits. However, some conditions require an in-person evaluation.

Finally, a patient who must go out to a medical appointment could potentially be exposed, despite every precaution being taken. Even if they do not develop any detectable symptoms, they may still be able to spread disease.

Asymptomatic Carriers

We now know that 40% or more of the transmission of COVID-19 is through asymptomatic carriers who don't know they have it. That makes this disease particularly challenging. Every precaution we can layer in place—wearing masks, eye protection, gowns, gloves, social distancing, disinfection, hand washing, hand sanitizing—helps to lower risk, but unfortunately we cannot eliminate all risk. I'm proud of our team that has risen to this challenge with grace and dedication. The fact that cases have only been associated with skilled nursing and not elsewhere in Penrose Harbor is very encouraging.

Interestingly, when speaking with Leading Age Washington about our outbreak, we were informed that there have been over ***100 facilities in Washington with a new COVID outbreak since Friday the 20th of November.*** This is just jaw dropping.

Testing Types

Some of you have asked about testing. I have mentioned screening above. Testing is different.

There are two types of testing: PCR and Antigen testing. Both identify the presence of the virus in the nasal passages which tells us if someone is actively carrying the COVID virus. PCR testing is about 98% accurate but must be analyzed in a certified laboratory. Test results typically take anywhere from 48 hours to 5-7 days.

Antigen testing is considered a rapid point of care test and can be performed in health care settings that have a Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendment (CLIA) waiver. Penrose Harbor has a CLIA waiver which allows us to perform Antigen testing. Antigen testing is about 85% accurate and results are available in 15 minutes. It's helpful to identify asymptomatic carriers and isolate them if they are a resident or patient or send them home for quarantine if they are a staff member. We have been testing staff members once a week because of the high positivity rate in Pierce County. All tests have been negative up until yesterday.

Testing Is Only Good For The Day You Receive It

The challenge with testing, as you have probably heard from public health advisories, is that your result is only good for the day you receive it. It's possible that you could have COVID but not enough of the virus has built up to trigger a positive test. Generally, it takes 5-7 days from the day of exposure to trigger a positive test, especially if you don't have symptoms. People with symptoms are highly contagious 2 days prior to the onset of their symptoms. Again, an invisible enemy we are trying to battle.

We are using all the tools in our toolkit to battle this pandemic and will continue to do so until the national public health emergency is declared resolved. I'm looking forward to regaining some sense of normalcy but I'm also confident that we will see changes in how we operate post-pandemic, especially in health care, long-term care and senior living. It will be interesting to see the lessons learned and how we will evolve to meet future challenges.

Thank you for being our partner in safety and wellness. ***We couldn't do it without you.***



Amy Webb, Executive Director

