



**STATE OF TENNESSEE**  
**DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH**  
Andrew Johnson Tower, 5<sup>th</sup> Floor  
710 James Robertson Parkway  
Nashville, Tennessee 37243

**BILL LEE**  
Governor

**LISA PIERCEY, MD, MBA, FAAP**  
Commissioner

May 1, 2020

Dear Nursing Home Administrator:

As we start to think about re-opening businesses throughout the state, we are taking extra measures to ensure that our most vulnerable populations are protected and closely monitored for illness caused by COVID-19. We know that COVID-19 is easily spread within congregate care settings and may be spread by individuals who have no symptoms. The ability to limit the spread of this virus within these settings depends on the ability to rapidly identify infections by testing individuals in these settings. To accomplish this, we are starting a new initiative to provide testing for all residents and staff members of nursing homes across the state. This will allow those at highest risk for severe illness to be safely tested and will allow facilities to rapidly isolate any staff or residents who test positive. The state will provide support for this initiative, including access to TN Department of Health and/or TN National Guard staff to assist with specimen collection, personal protective equipment (PPE) for specimen collection procedures, and laboratory testing at no cost. Testing results from this effort will also allow us to most efficiently distribute resources, prevention and control guidance tailored to your facility.

Recently, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) issued guidance stating that nursing homes will soon be required to report specific COVID-19 data through the National Health Safety Network (NHSN). At this time, we are still awaiting further guidance from both CMS and from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on the requirements for this reporting. In the meantime, we ask that you continue to regularly report any clusters (2 or more) cases of COVID-19 immediately to either your local health department or to the TN Department of Health.

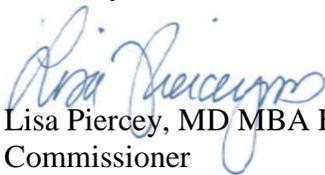
On April 9, 2020, you and your colleagues received a memo regarding Long-Term Care Facility COVID-19 Reporting. Please note, the Tennessee Department of Health's intent is not to change any of the reporting requirements. Incidents of abuse, neglect, and misappropriation occurring at facilities should continue to be reported pursuant to T.C.A. §68-11-211 through the IRS system as they normally would. Similarly, a disruption of any service vital to the continued safe operation of the facility or to the health and safety of its patients and personnel, including those related to COVID-19, should continue to be reported through the IRS system. Reports of communicable and reportable diseases should continue to be reported to the Department and county health departments through the regular methods. If you have questions about the details of reporting mechanisms the State Health Operations Center can be contacted at (615) 741-7247.

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As we work together on this initiative, please know testing must occur and be completed during the month of May. We will be posting a FAQs document on the Tennessee Department of Health's COVID-19 and Health Care Facilities websites in the coming days for your reference. If you have any questions please contact Dr. Pam Talley at (615) 532-8516 or [Pamela.Talley@tn.gov](mailto:Pamela.Talley@tn.gov).

We appreciate your commitment to protect the health, safety, and welfare of Tennesseans.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Lisa Piercey".

Lisa Piercey, MD MBA FAAP  
Commissioner