

Good afternoon,

As you are aware, on Thursday August 12, 2021, the Department of Health announced an expectation that **all** skilled nursing facilities (SNFs) will get at least 80% of their staff fully vaccinated against COVID-19 by October 1, 2021, and on August 18, 2021 the federal government announced that it would be requiring staff vaccinations within Medicare and Medicaid-participating nursing homes. The Department is supportive of the direction the federal government is taking, and the Department's 80% expectation still holds.

As of September 27, all counties in Pennsylvania are in high community transmission and, per CMS guidance, must be testing unvaccinated staff twice a week. Because of the high frequency of testing that already must be occurring, at this time, the Department **will not be requiring more frequent testing of unvaccinated employees**. However, the Department will continue to monitor facilities' testing patterns to ensure they are in compliance with CMS requirements.

For facilities that have met the 80% staff vaccination expectation, the Department will help support surveillance testing through federal grant funding. More information on the operationalization of these efforts will be forthcoming in the near future. The logistics around this support have been under development for some time and are close to rollout. We are committed to supporting those SNFs that have focused on vaccination efforts and have met the 80% goal.

As a reminder, to increase transparency for the public, the Department also launched a new skilled nursing facility vaccine dashboard to clearly provide the vaccination rates at all nursing homes in the state. This is data that nursing homes are already required to report to the federal government – the Department is simply making the data available in an easy-to-understand format on our website.

These vaccination and testing strategies are intended to:

- Increase the rate of vaccination among staff,

Ensure testing is happening frequently in areas where vaccination is low and transmission is high, and

- Improve transparency for the public on vaccination rates in skilled nursing facilities.

Thank you.