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[www.GoodShepherdCommunities.org](http://www.GoodShepherdCommunities.org)

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To All Families of our Skilled Nursing and Adult Care Residents,

**PLEASE READ THE ENTIRE NEWSLETTER FOR IMPORTANT INFORMATION ON COVID. THIS IS THE PRIMARY MEANS OF COMMUNICATION ON THIS TOPIC.**

### **“WELCOME” TO OUR NEW FAMILY CONTACTS**

We are required to notify all residents, families and staff of a facility whenever we have a positive COVID-19 test result for any staff member or resident. While CMS requires this notice be made by 5 pm of the next day, NYS is more stringent, requiring notice within 24 hours. Two points of contact are required.

To help us meet these requirements, we have utilized a broadcast tool (School Messenger) to send emails and automated phone calls to up to two email addresses and two phone numbers per resident or resident contact, which is usually the first Health Care Proxy. The system then broadcasts to all the contact phone numbers and emails in this database. We also use this system to send out this weekly update letter to our resident family contacts.

**You will also receive a broadcast when we have a staff member or resident test positive for COVID-19.** This includes an email *and a phone call*. We understand these phone calls can come at inconvenient times and would like to offer you the option to opt out of the phone calls for one or both of the numbers on file *so long as we have an email address on file to receive the alert*. This opt out will only effect the notification databases used by School Messenger. All contact info will remain on file in our Electronic Health Record, PointClickCare.

If you wish to opt out of alerts for one or both phone numbers we have file, please email me at [pm@goodshepherdcommunities.org](mailto:pm@goodshepherdcommunities.org) with the specifics. Please note it will take time to make the changes to the databases, so dependent on volume, there may be a delay from the time you make the request and the time the database revisions are completed. Thank you in advance for your patience.

### **TESTING**

Each week we will provide you with updated information on COVID-19 testing at all of our campuses.

We will no longer be presenting the charts for testing for cause and mass testing but will continue to provide narratives for any new positive cases.

### ***Staff Testing 3/17/21-3/23/21***

In the last round of staff testing, we had the following positive results:

*GSFH*

3/17/21

A clinical employee who works on our long term care unit (Cameo Court) in the Skilled Nursing Facility tested positive. This employee is asymptomatic and will self-isolate for 14 days. There were 15 residents who were considered close contacts with the positive staff member. This was a “low level” exposure due to the PPE being used by the staff member at the time of the contact. Any close contacts will follow department of health instructions regarding quarantine. All close contacts have been notified and all families are also being contacted. **This required us to pause our Skilled Nursing Facility visitation on our long term care unit (Cameo Court) until further notice.**

3/23/21

A CNA on the Rehab Unit tested positive. No resident or staff exposures as everyone was wearing proper PPE. However, this does require us to pause visitation on the Rehab Unit.

*Chase:* No new positive test results

*GSVE:* No new positive test results during the reporting period, but today we did receive a positive staff test result for an IL staff member that we will include in next week's summary. There are no implications for visitation.

### ***Resident Testing 3/17/21-3/23/21***

*GSFH*

3/17/21

As a result of the positive staff member, we were required to conduct mass resident testing. Unfortunately, one of our residents on our rehab unit tested positive. The resident has mild symptoms and will be on isolation for 14 days. There were no staff or residents considered close contacts of the positive resident due to PPE in use. Based on evolving guidelines, NYS DOH did not require us to close the Rehab Unit to visitation at this point as the resident was a new admission and her exposure was not in the facility.

*Chase:* No new positive test results.

*GSVE:* No new positive tests results.

### **COVID related Deaths 3/17/21-3/23/21**

*GSFH:* We are happy to report there were no COVID-19 related resident deaths at GSFH.

*Chase:* We are happy to report there were no COVID-19 related resident deaths at Chase.

*GSVE:* We are happy to report there were no COVID-19 related resident deaths at GSVE.

### **Vaccination**

- **SNF and ACF**
  - In Broome County (GSFH and GSVE) and Chenango County (Chase), NYS through the local health department is supplying vaccines for new residents, and we are partnering with our Long Term Care pharmacy, the Medicine Shoppe, to administer these vaccines.
- **Independent Living**
  - **The Medicine Shoppe, our Long Term Care Pharmacy has offered clinics for our IL residents.**
    - GSFH: All apartment residents who elected to receive the vaccine received the vaccine.
    - GSVE: All IL residents who elected to receive the vaccine have received it.
  - NYS residents over 65 or with certain underlying conditions are also eligible to be vaccinated at other sites. To explore eligibility, available sites and learn how to schedule an appointment, access this link: <https://am-i-eligible.covid19vaccine.health.ny.gov/>
- **Staff**
  - The federal program which supplied vaccines for staff is ending, and we are transitioning into a new phase of the staff vaccination program. In Broome County (GSFH and GSVE) and Chenango County (Chase), NYS through the local health department will supply vaccines for new staff or staff who had previously declined the vaccine, and we are partnering with our Long Term Care pharmacy, the Medicine Shoppe, to administer these vaccines.

We continue to educate our employees on the vaccines effectiveness and safety record, and to advocate for our employees to help protect themselves and our residents by being vaccinated. There will be no cost to employees for this vaccination.



All 6 living US Presidents, both Republicans and Democrats, have now endorsed vaccination against COVID-19, with President Trump being the most recent President to make a direct appeal to the American people to get vaccinated. And all 6 Presidents and First Ladies have received their vaccines. **Vaccination is not a political issue!!**

- **Current Vaccination Statistics:** Please note these figures are very fluid as we have new admissions, discharges, new hires, terminated employees, etc. We are holding regular vaccine clinics to allow new residents and staff to get vaccinated, as well as people who may have changed their minds since previous clinics.

Vaccination Status					
	SNF Residents	ACF Residents	SNF Employees	ACF Employees	IL Employees
GSFH	96.4% on Cameo Court and 93.8% on Rehab	98.1%	51.6%	48.7%	n\a
GSVE	96%	96.0%	82.0%	51.0%	74.0%
Chase	98%	n\a	37% 44% have declined and 19% want to wait for the Johnson and Johnson one shot vaccine	n\a	n\a

While this is not mandatory for our residents or staff, we are hoping all of our eligible residents and staff will elect to be vaccinated unless there are contraindications. **Help us reach herd immunity!!**

### NYS Mandated Staff Testing

Per NYS, full-time staff in SNFs are required to be tested twice per week for COVID-19, and those who do not meet the FT hours requirement must be tested once per week. As the positivity rate in NYS and in our area declines, we anticipate this being reduced to once per week. GSC has updated our policy for testing for staff based in IL and ALR to require only one test per week which is what NYS DOH recommends. This will help conserve resources and ease some of the burden on the staff administering the tests.

### Furloughed Staff

Furloughing is no longer having a major impact on facility staffing, so we will no longer be reporting on this metric. Of course, if this changes, we will re-introduce this.

### NYS Visitation Guidance

NYSDOH will focus on the county's COVID-19 rate of transmission to determine if nursing home (SNF) visitation is allowed and if visitors will need to be tested for COVID-19 prior to the visit. The county positivity rate is based on CMS data, rather than NYS generated data. If a visitor tests positive, they will not be allowed to visit.

- County COVID-19 transmission rate less than 5% (CMS rates) - no COVID-19 test required but encouraged by NYSDOH prior to visiting. However, CMS discourages requiring testing or vaccinations under any circumstances, and only encourages it when the County positivity rate exceeds 5%. In an attempt to comply with both these directives, GSC has opted **not** to require COVID testing for SNF visitors when the County rate is <5%. **We are excited to report both Chenango County and Broome County currently have positivity rates <5%.**

**Therefore, visitors to our SNFs will no longer require COVID testing, easing the burden on staff and, most importantly, on family members and friends.** (Visitors to ALRs and IL have not been required to test.)

- County COVID-19 transmission rate between 5% and 10% (CMS Rates)- must be tested for COVID-19 within 72 hours of the visit. Can be a PCR or rapid test.
- County COVID-19 transmission rate greater than 10% (CMS rates)- no visitation allowed except for compassionate care.
- Individuals vaccinated no less than 14 days before the date of the visit and no more than 90 days prior to the visit can provide proof of vaccination in lieu of testing.
- Required tests must be completed within 72 hours prior to the scheduled visit. You can opt to pursue testing in the community prior to the visit: either a PCR or Rapid Antigen test is acceptable.
- You may also choose to be tested at the facility by appointment only (walk-ins are not allowed) Tests must be scheduled within the 72 hours prior to the scheduled visit. Testing at the facility is completed using a Rapid Antigen test via a monitored, self-collected nasal swab. Results are available within 15-30 minutes. Facility testing is currently free of charge. If a visitor tests positive during a facility Rapid Antigen being performed, the visitor will be informed, the visit will not move forward, and the visitor will be directed to contact their community provider for any additional follow-up. All Rapid Antigen test results that have been performed at the facility are required to be reported to the NYS DOH whether it is negative or positive.

Appointments for rapid COVID testing must be made in advance in accordance with each facility’s policy.

We are disappointed that the new guidance continues to require visitation to pause if there has been a positive case of COVID-19 within 14 days. We continue to work with our association to encourage NYS to adopt more liberal guidelines.

**Positivity Rates and COVID Zones**

CMS positivity rates by county is the metric used for visitation per NYS. Note CMS stats lag one week behind.

Percent Positive and Tests in prior 14 days:		Data from March 3-March 16							
County	FIPS	State	FEMA Region	Population	NCHS Urban Rural Classification	Tests in prior 14 days	14-day test rate	Percent Positivity in prior 14 days	Test Positivity Classification - 14 day
Broome County, NY	36007	NY	2	190,488	Small metro	15,094	7,924	4.9%	Green
Chenango County, NY	36017	NY	2	47,207	Non-core	4,405	9,331	2.9%	Green

Currently, none of our facilities are in a COVID-19 cluster hot spot.

**FAQs:** We receive multiple individual emails or calls with questions. Rather than respond individually to multiple individuals asking the same or similar questions, we have added a FAQs section each week. Please note we have an obligation to maintain the privacy of the health information of our employees and cannot provide information which could potentially identify them.

*Q: Which of our facilities and level of care currently allow visitors?*

**A: Chase is open for visitation, as is GSVE at all levels of care. At GSFH, both Cameo Court (SNF LTC floor) and the SNF Rehab Unit are closed for visitation, while ACF\ALP remains open.**

Because the hours available and locations vary by facility and level of care, we are issuing facility\level of care specific broadcasts to the impacted families with more specific information.

Also please note that a single positive COVID-19 test at a facility\level of care will result in the Department of Health suspending visitation for another 14 days. In the event that we must suspend visitation, we will notify any visitors scheduled individually, and then issue a broadcast with more general information.

Please remember that NYS DOH has very strict guidelines on how we structure our visitations. Social distancing is absolutely required. **Despite all the heartwarming media coverage of grandparents seeing their grandchildren for the first time since the pandemic restrictions went into effect, the rules for LTC remain more stringent. We continue to advocate for NYS to amend their regulations to more closely align with CMS guidance.**

If visitors do not comply with the current guidelines, the visitor will be asked to leave and may not be allowed to return depending on the nature of the violation. These guidelines are for the protection of our residents, and we ask everyone to comply.

We continue to offer virtual visits, and can arrange for window visits. Both should be scheduled through the Therapeutic Recreation department.

### **Donations**

- The family of Joe Constable provided individually wrapped caramels for the staff on GSFH's Cameo Court

Please remember to contact the facility's Administrator prior to making a non-monetary donation so they are aware and they can review any restrictions.



Please visit our website for ongoing coverage of our response to COVID-19.

Thank you all for your patience during this difficult time. If you are feeling unusually high levels of stress, there are a number of resources available.

- Office of Mental Health Emotional Support Helpline: 1-844-863-9314 \*  
The Emotional Support Helpline provides free and confidential support, helping callers experiencing increased anxiety due to the coronavirus emergency. The Helpline is staffed by volunteers, including mental health professionals, who have received training in crisis counseling.
- CDC Resources : <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/managing-stress-anxiety.html>

Kathy Swezey  
GSFH Executive Director

Jennifer Davidson  
GSVE Health Care Administrator

Gail Murray  
Chase Acting Licensed Nursing Home  
Administrator\*

\*Gabby Skillen is currently on Family  
Medical Leave and we anticipate her  
return in June.