



January 27, 2021

To All Independent Living and Adult Care Residents:

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

In last week’s letter, we announced our partnership with The Medicine Shoppe to provide COVID vaccinations on site for our Independent Living residents. Later we became aware that many of our residents were unaware of the program, and hadn’t noted the article. COVID information evolves rapidly, and in the case of the vaccinations, the plan for the clinics was finalized the day of the letter (1/20), and we included the information assuming this would reach all the residents. The team’s attention then turned to the logistics of arranging to the clinics as quickly as possible.

TESTING

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

Testing Tracker: Summary of Employees & Residents Diagnostic Testing								
Employees	To date (since pandemic start)				New Suspected Cases			
	Employees tested	Tests Pending	Employees Positive	Employees Negative	Employees tested	Tests Pending	Employees Positive	Employees Negative
Chase	20	0	4	16	0	0	0	0
GSFH	27	0	6	20 and 1 inconclusive	0	0	0	0
GSVE	24	0	5	19	1	0	0	1
1/13/21 note the 3 'employees for cause' are actually one person who travels b/w campuses								
Residents	To date (since pandemic start)				New Suspected Cases			
Residents tested	Tests Pending	Residents Positive	Residents Negative	Residents tested	Tests Pending	Residents Positive	Residents Negative	
Chase	19	0	2	17	0	0	0	0
GSFH	84	0	10	74	4	0	0	4
GSVE	44	0	2	42	1	0	0	1
Tested as of 1/19/20					1/20/21-1/26/21			
Please note some testing was purely precautionary as the individual was asymptomatic. Ex: fall led to ER visit and tested.								

Please note the chart above is for testing conducted for cause only. At this time, it does not include the mass staff weekly testing discussed below, resident exposure testing, resident mass testing or staff testing done as part of any pre-op procedures.

Mass Resident Testing

Mass Resident Testing				
	Tested	Positive	Negative	Pending, Inconclusive or Indeterminate
GSFH	33	1	32	0
GSVE	18	0	18	0
Chase	44	21 repeats	21	2

NYS DOH Mandatory Testing for all Staff: Results of week of 1/20/21-1/26/21:

Mass Staff Testing

Mass Employee Testing				
	Tested	Positive	Negative	Pending, Inconclusive or Indeterminate
GSFH	330	3 and 1 repeat	326	0
GSVE	213	1	212	0
Chase	151	1 and 14 repeats	129	7

Staff Testing 1/20/21-1/26/21

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

GSFH:

1/20/21

- One of our employees in ACF received a positive test result. No other staff are considered close contacts while one resident was considered exposed and placed on precautions. Subsequently the exposed resident tested negative for COVID-19.

1/21/21

- Two of our employees in Nursing received a positive test result. One ACF resident and one SNF resident were exposed and placed on precautions. Subsequently the exposed resident tested negative for COVID-19. No staff were close contacts.

Chase

1/21/21

- One of our employees on the resident care team received a positive test result from an outside provider. No other staff or residents are considered close contacts due to the PPE staff are wearing while in the facility. The staff member will self-isolate for the required period.

GSVE: No new positive tests results for staff.

Resident Testing 1/20/21-1/26/21: Please note the narrative below includes **all positive test results**, including results of required resident mass testing. Therefore it may not correspond with the table above, which represents only those tested for cause.

GSFH:

1/21/21

- One of our residents on our Rehab unit tested positive for COVID-19. No other residents or staff were considered close contacts.

Chase: No new positive tests.

GSVE:

1/24/21

- A resident in Independent Living tested positive for COVID-19 after contact with a COVID-19 positive family member. The resident is currently hospitalized. No other residents or staff members are considered close contacts.

Resident COVID related Deaths 1/20/21-1/26/21

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

Chase

- Two of our residents who had previously tested positive for COVID-19 passed away, one at Chase and one in the hospital. Our thoughts are with their families and loved ones.

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

Vaccination

- **SNF**
 - At this point, all three of our campuses have had their first and second vaccine clinics for all SNF residents.
- **ACF:**
 - GSVE ALR clinic dates: 1/14, 2/4, 2/25
 - GSFH ALR Clinic Dates: 1/13, 2/3, 2/24
- **Independent Living**
 - **The Medicine Shoppe, our Long Term Care Pharmacy has begun to hold for our IL residents.**
 - GSFH: Friday 1/22/21. All apartment residents who elected to receive the vaccine received the vaccine.
 - GSVE: Monday 1/25/21. 71 appointments were available and were scheduled in alphabetic order. A second clinic will be scheduled within the next few weeks as more vaccine becomes available.
 - While there is no cost for the vaccine, we will be gathering all the required paperwork in advance to expedite the day of the clinic, including driver's license, and Medicare cards for each resident. And please remember the vaccine requires two doses 3-4 weeks apart.
 - NYS residents over 65 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**
 - ALL staff regardless of department are eligible for the program, with prioritization based on risk. These clinics have begun at all the Campuses.
- There will be no cost to employees for this vaccination.
- 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.**

NYS Mandated Staff Testing

Per NYS, full-time staff are required to be tested twice per week for COVID-19, and those who do not meet the hours requirement must be tested once per week. Our facilities have made arrangements to meet this requirement.

Furloughed Staff

While we our facilities continue to provide quality care to all of our residents, we want to be completely transparent about some of the challenges we are facing. Each campus has had and continues to have employees who have either tested positive for COVID-19 or have had close contacts, and are therefore furloughed for a minimum of 14 days. This will obviously create staffing challenges. The following summarizes the currently furloughed staff members at each facility:

	Nursing	Env Servic	Dietary	ACF	Other
GSFH	7	0	0	1	0
GSVE	3	1	0	1	2
Chase	7	1	0	0	1

Positivity Rates and COVID Zones

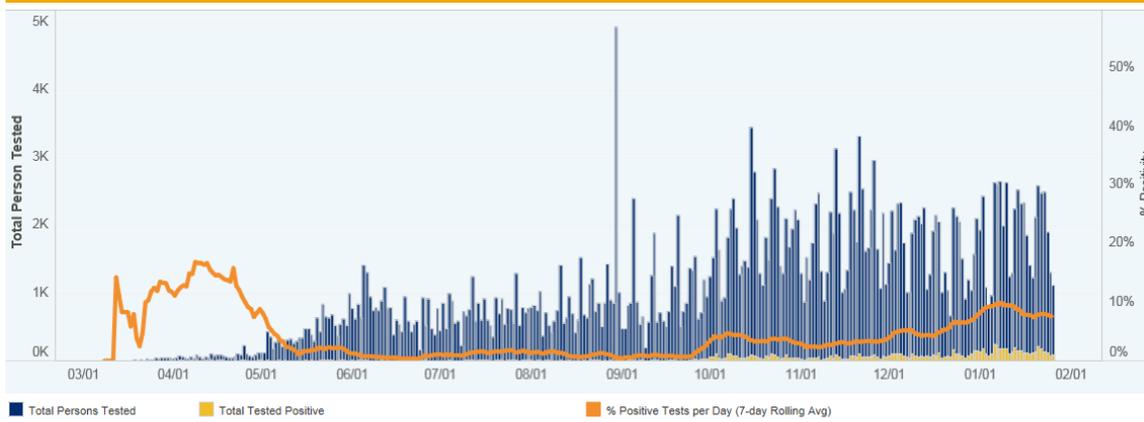
NYS reports on COVID Positivity Rates by County and also on COVID Cluster Spots. Each week, we will include the most recent info. Increasing positivity can impact all businesses. Per CMS guidelines:

Table 2: Routine Testing Intervals Vary by Community COVID-19 Activity Level

Community COVID-19 Activity	County Positivity Rate in the past week	Minimum Testing Frequency
Low	<5%	Once a month
Medium	5% - 10%	Once a week*
High	>10%	Twice a week*

*This frequency presumes availability of Point of Care testing on-site at the nursing home or where off-site testing turnaround time is <48 hours.

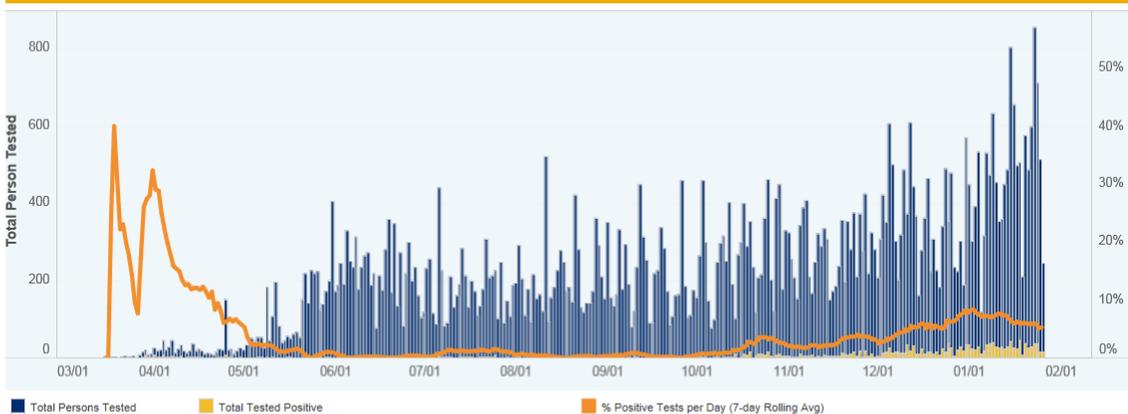
% Positive Results Over Time - Broome



Test Results - Yesterday

		Total Persons Tested	Total Tested Positive	% Positive, Yesterday	% Positive, 7-day Avg
Southern Tier	Broome	1,037	96	9.3%	7.6%

% Positive Results Over Time - Chenango



Test Results - Yesterday

		Total Persons Tested	Total Tested Positive	% Positive, Yesterday	% Positive, 7-day Avg
Southern Tier	Chenango	230	16	7.0%	5.3%

Currently, none of our facilities are in a COVID 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: Why are we making the vaccine optional for staff instead of mandating it as a condition of employment?

A: The most compelling reasons are quality of care impact and legal implications:

1. **Quality of Care Impact:** There is a severe shortage of qualified workers in LTC that is nationwide. Our area is especially hard hit. We strive to recruit and retain workers, but it is a constant struggle. If we were to make the vaccine mandatory, we would certainly lose a significant number of our employees, who would quickly be re-employed by our competitors who did not mandate the vaccine. The impact on quality of care would be immense.
2. **Legal:** On December 16, 2020, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (“EEOC”) issued guidance regarding whether employers can require mandatory COVID-19 vaccines. The guidance states that employers may require employees to get the COVID-19 vaccine, subject to exceptions. These exceptions include physical disability, pursuant to the Americans with Disabilities Act (“ADA”), and sincere religious objections, pursuant to Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

However, the vaccines are currently authorized *for emergency use*. An Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) is a mechanism to facilitate the availability and use of medical countermeasures, including vaccines, during public health emergencies, such as the current COVID-19 pandemic. Under an EUA, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) may allow the use of *unapproved* medical products, or *unapproved* uses of approved medical products in an emergency to diagnose, treat, or prevent serious or life-threatening diseases or conditions when certain statutory criteria have been met, including that there are no adequate, approved, and available alternatives.

Many legal experts have indicated that given this status, we should not mandate the vaccine as a condition of employment.

Many of our staff are concerned about the safety of the vaccine, especially given the EUA status, and potential side effects. We are providing ongoing education to our staff on the vaccine’s safety and effectiveness, and made sure senior management were the first in line for the vaccine to set an example.

At this point, we prefer to work with our staff to re-assure them and guide them to the decision to receive the vaccine. They have been fighting COVID-19 for months to protect our residents, and we feel an obligation to be sensitive to their anxieties and fears. As we move towards higher staff participation in the vaccination program, the staff continue to be tested, and they continue to follow all infection control guidelines. We believe we will see an increase in the numbers of employees receiving the vaccine as they see how their coworkers react to their shots, and as the vaccine becomes more available in the greater community.

Another important point to note is that at this time, there is no conclusive evidence that being vaccinated results in being less likely to transmit the virus to others. So while we encourage our employees to receive the vaccine for their own sakes and to reduce the number of employees furloughed due to positive COVID-19 tests, the current science does not support the concept that vaccinating the caregivers offers additional protection to the residents.

And please remember we have offered clinics at all our campuses for all of our SNF and ACF residents who consented, all consenting GSFH Independent Living residents and are in the process of doing so for our GSVE Independent Living residents.

We will continue to review any new information and guidance, and will refine our position on this if we feel it is in the best interests of our residents and staff to do so.

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

A: Currently, all levels of care at all GSC facilities with the exception of GSVE ALR are required to pause visitation due to recent positive COVID test results.

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. COVID-19 prevalence is increasing in NYS. 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 the NYS DOH guidelines for visitation for ACFs and SNFs are different in many ways, including how many people can visit at a time and the SNF requirement that visitors present verified negative COVID test results within the last week prior to the visit. If you are concerned about this requirement and the burdens it presents, please reach out to the Governor's office at 1-518-474-8390 to voice your concerns.

Please remember that NYS DOH has very strict guidelines on how we structure our visitations. Social distancing is absolutely required. If visitors do not comply with these 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

- No new donations were received this week.

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.



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>

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