

# BUNCOMBE COUNTY EMERGENCY OPERATIONS

## CONGREGATE CARE READY TEAM

*Advanced age, underlying health conditions and living conditions with close contact between residents and staff combine to put populations in Long Term Care Facilities (LTCF) at a very high risk for serious illness from COVID-19.*

The *Buncombe County Emergency Operations Congregate Care Ready Team* consists of Health and Human Services and Emergency Services Personnel who can help to troubleshoot some of the more common challenges that LTCFs face in response to COVID-19. These challenges include procuring and properly using personal protective equipment (PPE), planning for isolation and quarantine of staff and residents, and obtaining testing supplies and the personnel and laboratory to perform testing. As the testing guidelines continue to expand and case counts grow in LTCFs, the *Ready Team* will offer a responsive and flexible approach to support these facilities.

### **PUBLIC HEALTH ROLE**

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, Buncombe County Public Health:

- Conducts case and outbreak investigation [An outbreak of COVID-19 in a congregate living setting is defined as two or more laboratory-confirmed cases within two incubation periods (28 days) in the same facility.]
- Performs contact tracing to identify exposed individuals and new cases
- Links individuals and facilities to providers and/or laboratories for specimen collection and testing when indicated
- Provides guidance on isolation and quarantine
- Makes infection control and prevention recommendations.

The goal of all of these efforts is to identify affected individuals and stop the spread of infection to protect the public's health.

### **FACILITY RESPONSIBILITY**

LTCFs are to ensure immediate testing of any residents or staff who develop fever or symptoms consistent with COVID-19. Additionally, [NC Department of Health and Human Services](#) considers people who live or work in LTCFs a priority group for testing, regardless of symptoms. [The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#) and Buncombe County Public Health recommends baseline testing of all nursing home residents and healthcare personnel, along with weekly testing of all healthcare personnel in those facilities. Buncombe County Public Health shares information with facilities on the providers and labs in our area that can perform specimen collection and testing, but ultimately, planning for and implementing such testing is the responsibility of each facility. Buncombe County Public Health is here to support LTCFs in their COVID-19 response and testing.

*(Continues on the next page.)*

## IF A CASE OF COVID-19 OCCURS IN A FACILITY STAFF MEMBER OR RESIDENT

At this time, when one lab-confirmed case of COVID-19 is identified in a long-term care facility, the recommendation of Buncombe County Public Health is that all staff and residents in that facility be tested, unless state and local health officials working with the facility determine that less extensive testing is appropriate. Buncombe County Communicable Disease nurses are in regular contact with facilities once a case has been identified, conducting a site visit with Environmental Health staff and providing guidance for infection control and testing. Facilities are encouraged to follow NCDHHS and CDC guidance for Congregate Care Settings and Long Term Care Settings.

After the initial round of testing, Buncombe County Public Health recommends that facilities continue to follow CDC guidance, by conducting follow-up testing as follows:

- Immediately test any resident or staff who subsequently develops fever or symptoms consistent with COVID-19.
- Continue testing of all previously negative residents and staff once a week until the testing identifies no new cases of COVID-19 over at least 14 days since the most recent positive result.

LTCFs and the individuals who work in them are crucial parts of our community, helping to care for our siblings, friends, parents, grandparents and extended family. We value the staff and administrators of these facilities and respect their dedication and service. We recognize the dignity and humanity of those for whom they care. Preventing the spread of COVID-19 outside of these facilities, in our broader community, is critical to preventing the spread of COVID-19 inside these facilities. We are all connected to each other, and our actions affect the lives of others, including the staff and residents of LTCFs. Handwashing, keeping our physical distance from others outside of our immediate household, staying home when we are sick and wearing a face covering when out in public all help to slow the spread of COVID-19 in our community.

## THE CONGREGATE CARE READY TEAM

helps to coordinate a weekly call with LTCFs in Buncombe County. Please contact us to be added to this group.

[congregatecare@buncombecounty.org](mailto:congregatecare@buncombecounty.org)



### STAY INFORMED

[buncombeready.org](http://buncombeready.org)

[ncdhhs.gov](http://ncdhhs.gov)

[cdc.gov](http://cdc.gov)

Call 2-1-1 for Community Resources

Text COVIDNC to 898-211 for Updates