

LTC Emergency Preparedness Digest

Quarterly Newsletter – Winter 2021

This quarterly e-newsletter is designed to provide Long Term Care Facilities with information on facility-level hazards and threats, emergency preparedness programs, recent events, conference opportunities, and upcoming classes in Georgia.

Georgia's Long Term Care Emergency Preparedness Educational Program is funded through Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), Civil Money Penalty (CMP) Funds – Emergency Preparedness in Georgia Certified Nursing Homes, Grant #: 18044G (CMP REQUEST #: 2017-04-GA-1219)



We have a new **LTCEPEP web page!** Click the button below to view our course descriptions, schedule, previous newsletters, and more. Feel free to share this resource with your colleagues.

Click Here for LTCEPEP Web Page

Winter Focus Area: Mental Health

Maintaining a positive outlook is important for residents, staff, and family members especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Read below for mental health strategies and resources.

CMS Appendix Z Related Requirements

E-0007: Emergency Plan

The facility must develop and maintain an emergency preparedness plan that must be reviewed and updated at least annually. The plan must do the following:

- Address patient/client population, including, but not limited to, **persons at-risk**; the type of services the [facility] has the ability to provide in an emergency; and continuity of operations, including delegations of authority and succession plans.
 - **At-risk populations** would also include, but are not limited to, the elderly, persons in hospitals and **nursing homes**, people with physical and **mental disabilities** as well as others with access and functional needs, and infants and children.

Mental Health

Resident Mental Health

Nursing home residents have a higher risk of experiencing feelings of isolation and depression than the general population. These feelings have been exacerbated due to restrictions on social gatherings and activities throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Many residents are also experiencing trauma and grief after fellow residents and loved ones have passed or fallen ill during the pandemic. According to the CDC, social isolation increases the risk of premature death at levels similar to smoking, obesity, and physical inactivity. Social isolation is also

associated with a 50% increase of risk for dementia.

For these reasons, mental health treatment is essential and it may not be possible to deliver these services in-person. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) has allowed the use of telehealth services using audio and video capabilities (e.g. Zoom and Facetime) to be billed at the same rate as in-person visits. One study found mental health treatment was the most common telehealth service offered during the pandemic where 53% of patients with a behavioral health condition sought telehealth from March to May 2020.

There are some challenges presented with providing telehealth services including access to video-conferencing devices and making sure residents know how to use the device. The American Psychological Association recommends selecting a staff member who can assist with telehealth appointments (1). Residents may use their own device or a facility-provided one and the designated staff member can assist in setting it up and disinfecting the device after each use if it is shared with others.

These devices can also be used to help residents visit loved ones virtually. Maintaining social interaction is key to combat feelings of loneliness or depression. A survey of nursing home residents in thirty-six states showed that 76% of residents felt more lonely since the gathering restrictions were enacted due to COVID-19 (2). This is undoubtedly coupled with the fact that only 23% of residents reported they were able to go outside for fresh air at least once a week compared with 83% of residents before COVID-19. For more tips on implementing virtual visits and telehealth services, see the resources below.

Sources:

(1) https://www.apaservices.org/practice/legal/technology/telehealth-nursing-homes-covid-19?_ga=2.4215856.221091681.1610386205-1399819374.1610386205

(2) <https://www.marketwatch.com/story/im-very-lonely-and-depressedmany-nursing-home-residents-say-they-feel-like-they-are-in-prison-2020-10-12>

Mental Health for Residents' Families

Not only are residents impacted by the restrictions, so are residents' families. Before the pandemic, 56% of residents had visitors three or more times a week compared with only 5% of residents now (1). Many families are missing their loved ones and do not want to risk contracting or giving COVID-19 during a visit. However, technology can again be used as a bridge for residents and their families to maintain social contact and stay up to date on life outside of the facility. Other options to stay in touch could be care packages or postcards to and from family members (2).

As always, it is important to keep residents' families in the loop on what is happening within the facility. There are requirements for family notification for reporting positive COVID-19 cases with associated time deadlines. It is also important to manage expectations for the residents and their families. It may be a while before visitation or social gatherings are safe to do again.

Sources:

(1) <https://www.marketwatch.com/story/im-very-lonely-and-depressedmany-nursing-home-residents-say-they-feel-like-they-are-in-prison-2020-10-12>

(2) <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2020/03/18/coronavirus-social-distancing-seniors-cards/2871335001/>

Staff Member Mental Health

Staff members, both clinical and non-clinical, are on the frontlines of the COVID-19 pandemic. There are several organizational strategies for stress prevention and management, see below for more details.

- **Provide an effective management structure and leadership**
 - Clear chain of command and reporting structure
 - Available and accessible supervisors
 - Disaster orientation for all workers
 - Shifts of no longer than 12 hours, followed by 12 hours off
 - Briefings at the beginning of each shift with overlapping shifts so outgoing workers can brief incoming workers
 - Have necessary supplies available (e.g. paper, pens, gloves, masks)
 - Use communication tools (e.g. cellphones, tablets, radios)
- **Define clear goals and roles for each position**
- **Nurture team support**
 - Create a buddy system to support and monitor stress reactions
 - Promote a positive atmosphere with support, tolerance, and frequent praise
- **Develop a plan for stress management**
 - Assess worker morale and output regularly
 - Encourage short breaks throughout the day
 - Educate staff on signs and symptoms of worker stress and coping strategies

Personal Mental Health

During this time, it can be difficult to maintain a healthy work and life balance. See these strategies below to help manage stress and anxiety.

- **Take action**
 - Feeling anxious or worried is expected during these times. Share your concerns with colleagues, team members, family, or friends to problem solve and plan steps to help cope
- **Pace yourself**
 - Monitor yourself for disrupted sleep, excessive fatigue, irritability, poor focus, and marked anxiety. If you are running on empty, it becomes difficult to care for residents, be a good team member, and maintain healthy relationships with family and friends.
- **Breathe**
 - Try mindful breathing several times a day. Take a moment for low and slow breaths before getting out of your car, entering work, and before entering a resident's room. This helps keep you calm and collected.
- **Maintain good health habits**
 - Health habits can take a hit when stress levels are high. Try to prioritize healthy eating, getting enough sleep, exercising, and spending time outdoors.
- **Exercise, exercise, exercise**
 - Aerobic exercise is vital for stress reduction, consider walking, biking, running, hiking, doing a yoga video, or throwing a Frisbee or football. A short walk or workout is better than nothing.
- **Social connection**
 - Reach out to your family, friends, and community groups to maintain social connections. You can call them or use video group platforms such as Zoom or Facetime to stay in touch and support each other.
- **Take breaks at work and home**
 - Work with your team to take mini-breaks. Even a 10 minute break per shift can be calming and increase focus. At home, prioritize time to enjoy a book, movie, podcast, puzzle, or coloring book. Any of these can help give your mind a break from the stress of the day.
- **Promote teamwork**
 - Let your team know if you have children or relatives who require care and see how they can assist you.
- **Maintain structure at home**
 - If you are working from home and/or your children are doing school virtually, establish a consistent workplace and schedule to help with focus and productivity. Don't forget to plan time for breaks as well.
- **Be flexible**
 - Flexibility is essential. Each day brings unique stressors not previously experienced. Ask for support, assess the situation, make necessary changes, and move forward.

Source: https://www.apaservices.org/practice/ce/self-care/health-providers-covid-19?_ga=2.19206587.221091681.1610386205-1390819374.1610386205

Seeking Mental Health Treatment

If the strategies listed above are not managing your stress or anxiety, look into mental health treatment such as therapy. There are many different types of therapy and therapists can have a variety of licensures and focus areas. Here are some tips to help find the right therapist for you:

- **Look at your health insurance provider directory**
 - If you plan to pay for therapy using your health insurance, look at your provider's network and pay attention to how many sessions are covered each year
- **Ask someone you trust**
 - A referral from someone you know can be a good place to start, ask them how their sessions are structured and see if it would be a good fit for you
- **Use a reliable online database**
 - There are several databases available, see the source listed below for a list of databases
- **Explore local resources**
 - Your community may have resources available, especially if you are part of a subgroup seeking treatment. Local groups may include: students, workplace, domestic or sexual abuse therapy groups, and faith-based centers.
- **Reach out to organizations that address your area of concern**
 - Organizations based around eating disorders, anxiety and depression, PTSD, as well as organizations for people of color, veterans, women, LGBTQ+ persons, disabled persons, bereaved persons, etc. are available and can provide lists of licensed therapists near you
- **Think about your goals ahead of time**
 - When you have clear goals of what you want to gain from therapy, your therapist can help you achieve them in a more direct way. If you believe you may require medication, find a clinical care provider who is able to prescribe medication
- **Try an online therapy app**
 - Apps such as Talkspace and Betterhelp offer tools to explore the type of therapy you want and match you with a licensed, accredited therapist you can work with online or over the phone
 - Digital therapy platforms can be more convenient and affordable - weekly sessions range from \$35 - \$80 for online therapy
- **Ask questions about the things that matter to you**
 - Examples of questions to ask a potential mental health professional: What are your certifications? How many years have you been practicing? What groups of people have you worked with? Have you worked with people who are dealing with (insert experience or issue)? What insurance do you accept? Do you bill the insurance company directly or do you require payment up front then I seek reimbursement from

- the insurance company? Do you accept Medicare or Medicaid? If I need medication, can you prescribe it?
- **Pay close attention to your own responses**
 - No matter how qualified your therapist is, your feelings of trust and comfort should be your top priority. Does your therapist listen to you or interrupt you? Do they validate your concerns?

Source: <https://www.healthline.com/health/how-to-find-a-therapist#provider-directory>



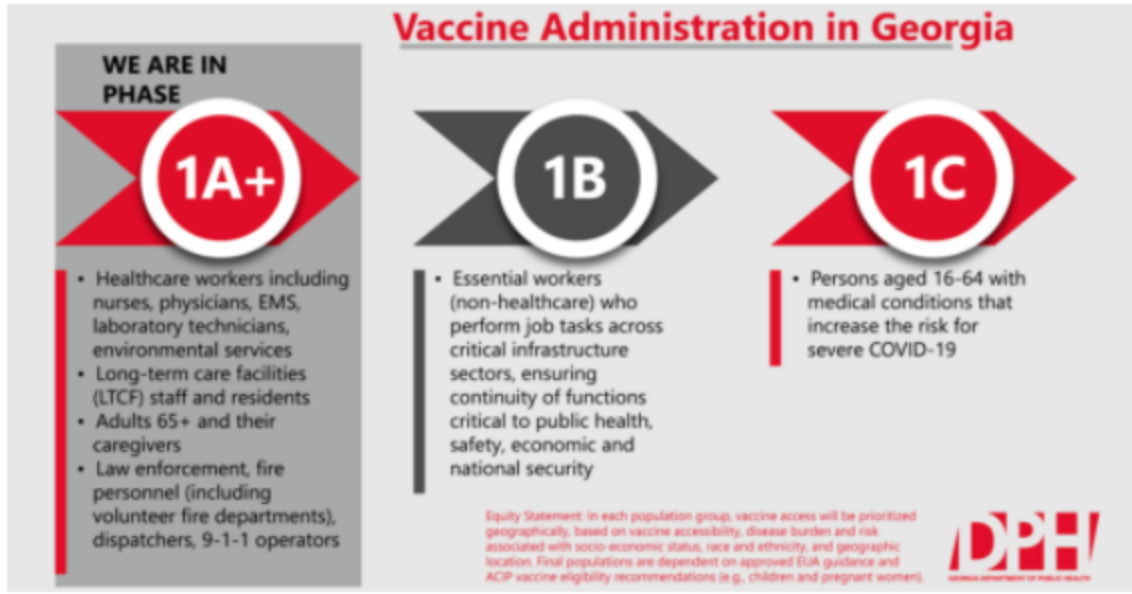
Mental Health Resources

- Organizational and Personal Tips for Managing and Preventing Stress: [Click Here](#)
- Tips for Retaining and Caring for Staff after a Disaster: [Click Here](#)
- Handling Stress During Public Health Emergencies: [Click Here](#)
- Disaster Responder Tips for Preventing and Managing Stress: [Click Here](#)

COVID-19 Vaccine Information

In Georgia, we are currently in Phase 1A+ which includes healthcare workers, long term care facility staff and residents, adults over the age of 65 and their caregivers, as well as first responders including law enforcement.

Click on the image below to download it.

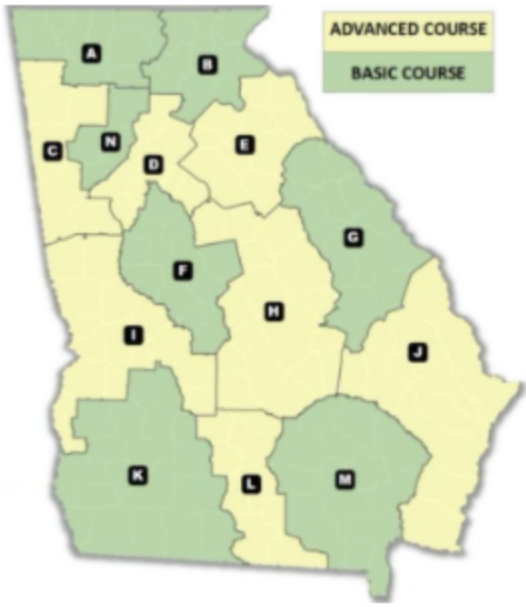


- There are two different brands of vaccines available for the prevention of COVID-19, Pfizer and Moderna. For an infographic comparing the two brands of vaccines: [Click Here](#)
- If your facility enrolled in the Federal Pharmacy Partnership with CVS or Walgreens, a frequently asked questions page is available: [Click Here](#)
 - COVID-19 Vaccine FAQ Sheet for Facility Staff: [Click Here](#)
 - COVID-19 Vaccine FAQ Sheet for Residents and Families: [Click Here](#)
- If your facility did NOT register for the federal program, and has not been contacted by your local health district to set up vaccination appointments, you can contact your local health district to find out how to get the COVID-19 vaccine for your residents and staff: [Click Here](#)
- To find a vaccine provider to schedule an appointment: [Click Here](#)
- For an informational page on COVID-19 and the vaccines available: [Click Here](#)
- For FAQs on required long term care facility COVID-19 Testing: [Click Here](#)

Upcoming Events

Virtual Trainings on Communication Platforms
GHA911: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/GHA911forAdministrators>
WebEOC: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/WebEOCtraining2021>
Everbridge: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/Everbridgetraining2021>

All Year 3 CMS GA LTCEPEP courses are now offered online due to COVID-19. Please download the full schedule below and continue reading for upcoming course offerings. Year 3 will end in February 2021 and Year 4 courses will resume in Fall 2021.



[Click HERE for Full Course Schedule](#)

CMS LTCEPEP Basic Course
February 11, 2021
Region A: Dalton, GA Area
Online via Zoom
https://ugeorgia.ca1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_9WvKxq3ZistMraZ

General Emergency Preparedness Resources

- Family/Home Preparedness: www.ready.gov/georgia
- Find your Local Emergency Management Agency (EMA): www.gema.georgia.gov/locations
- Find your Healthcare Coalition (HCC): www.gha911.org
- Georgia Health Care Association (GHCA): www.ghca.info/
- Regional Calendar for upcoming events and trainings: www.gha911.org/coalition-information/

Contact Us



If you have any questions about the e-newsletter, upcoming events, or course registration, please contact us at georgialtc@uga.edu



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