

PROTECTING LONG-TERM CARE

FACILITIES

Understand the Levels of Support

Long-term care facilities are the most fertile ground for the spread of COVID-19. “These facilities present a unique living situation where there is a concentrated population of high-risk individuals living in close quarters. This is a vulnerable population that shares the same medical staff so the virus can spread quickly when precautions are not taken,” explains Katy Cunningham, Registered Nurse, East Central Health District 6. “We have organized a specialized team and process to address the needs of the staff and resident populations of these facilities.”

In partnership with the Healthcare Coalition, the District has dedicated specific days per week to reach out to facilities and assess their needs proactively. The process begins with Ella Gardner, Healthcare Coalition Facilitator, who meets with the facilities as part of her regular job responsibilities. Utilizing these relationships, Ms. Gardner makes initial contact with facility administration to determine the facility resource needs. She assesses emergency staffing, Personal Protection Equipment (PPE), and testing needs. If a staff member or resident is symptomatic, or worse, has tested positive, the case is elevated to Ms. Cunningham, who obtains all information on the infected individual and provides this data to Joy Miller, Director, Office of Epidemiology, East Central Health District 6. Mrs. Miller begins the case investigation and contact tracing work.

Ms. Cunningham also addresses the facility’s protocols for prevention, access to the facility, procedures for staff, supplies, and resources and connects the facility with the U.S. National Guard for additional testing and cleaning needs. Ms. Cunningham’s goal is to prevent the infection of any additional staff member or resident. If a facility does not have a third-party cleaning contract in place, she works through the local county government to bring the U.S. National Guard in to facilitate those services. The U.S. National Guard is offering additional testing and cleaning services at no charge to the facility should they need assistance. If there is a facility in need of help with testing and cleaning, they can contact the East Central Health District for more information to get started.

The East Central Health District 6 team meets multiple times per week to discuss the current needs of long-term care facilities and identify potential hot spots before they occur.

Jonathan Adriano, Program Manager, East Central Health District 6, explains, “Ms. Cunningham is the first point of contact. She conducts what I would refer to as a well-check call. If there are no issues, she will continue to follow up. Should an issue arise, Ms. Cunningham is the one who will follow up. She is versed in current CDC guidelines specific to long-term care facilities and is the first medical consult the facility will receive. Should the facility need something that Ms. Cunningham cannot provide, we can connect them to Infection Prevention Specialists at the state level. We want all long-term care facilities, our local governments, and the community to understand there are three levels of support our District is offering. We are actively pursuing all assisted living and nursing homes in a proactive preventative measure.”

On a typical day, the East Central Health District does not have this level of contact with long-term care facilities, however they did not want to wait until they heard from the facility. Instead, they ensure proper measures were taken proactively to avoid the spread of the virus. The U.S. National Guard is also contacting facilities outside of the District’s efforts.

Minimizing risk and protecting the at-risk population of long-term care facilities is special work being done by a dedicated public health team. Through proactive prevention, utilization of mechanisms for ordering PPE, coordination of the U.S. National Guard for testing and cleaning, and collaboration of the local county governments with the East Central Health District, long-term care facilities are supported and protected.



Katy Cunningham
Public Health Registered
/ Enhanced Role Nurse