



State of Idaho
DIVISION OF VETERANS SERVICES
"Caring for America's Heroes"



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To Our Valued Residents and Family Members:

With this letter, we want to assure you that we remain committed to keeping our residents and staff safe. Although we continue to have no confirmed cases of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) in any of our facilities, we recognize that the virus has various possibilities of entering nursing homes and causing outbreaks. Many of our residents are elderly and may have medical conditions putting them at a very high risk of becoming sick, or even severely ill, with COVID-19.

To protect our vulnerable residents, we have been taking aggressive actions to reduce the risk in our residents and staff. While not an all-inclusive list, below is a vast summary of the actions we've been taking at our three State Veterans Homes (Boise, Lewiston and Pocatello) to help prevent the 2019 novel coronavirus from entering our Homes. In addition to the below measures, we are also carefully following all guidance received from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

1. We took on a proactive approach by initiating daily meetings with key staff starting on March 2, 2020 to begin the implementation of preventative measures, development of action plans and the employment of continuous staff training related to the pandemic. This took place so we were better prepared prior to Idaho's first confirmed case occurring on March 13, 2020.
2. On or before March 4, 2020, we had increased our infection control cleaning practices on all touch points (e.g. handrails, doorknobs, elevator buttons) to 3 times per day.
3. By March 5, 2020, we had designated one entrance into our buildings. We were also screening all visitors and staff with a list of questions and restricting access to the facilities if certain criteria was met per guidelines provided by CMS. Those who could enter the Homes, were required to sanitize their hands before entering the main buildings. We continue to screen all health care personnel at the start of each shift to include taking temperatures of all persons to check for fever.
4. In addition, by March 5, 2020 we began limiting group event visits and cancelled all outside outings except for sightseeing tours on the bus or outside activities where there were no other attendees. We have since been more creative in our activities programs and we are providing a variety of new experiences and activities for our residents.
5. On or about March 9, 2020, we canceled communal dining and all group activities. Previously, all residents had been encouraged to eat together in the main dining room; we have adapted this practice and now most residents are having their meals in their rooms with proper social distancing. Those residents who require additional assistance are eating in designated areas with greater staff monitoring while maintaining the recommended social distances.
6. By March 12, 2020, our non-essential health care personnel were identified, and they began telecommuting either part-time or full-time to keep traffic out of the Homes.

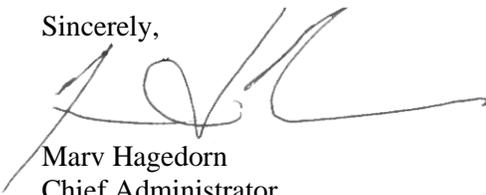
7. On March 13, 2020, directly following the Governor's emergency declaration, all visitation into the Homes was restricted except for certain compassionate care situations, such as end of life situations. We know that your presence is important for your loved one but, per guidance from the CDC, this is a necessary action to protect their health. Those visitors who meet the compassionate care criteria are first screened for fever and respiratory symptoms. Visitors who are permitted to enter the building are also required to frequently clean their hands, limit their visit to a designated area within the building, and wear a facemask. As the situation with COVID-19 is rapidly changing, we will continue to keep you updated regarding this restriction.
8. On March 13, 2020, we also introduced alternative methods of visitation (such as Skype and FaceTime) so that you can continue to communicate with your loved ones.
9. In early March, we began working with our HVAC experts and American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE) professionals related to negative pressurizing each resident room in all three Homes, sealing our buildings' duct leakage issues on the exhaust, and changing the exchange and air handlers to bring in 100% clean air through the corridors and halls into resident rooms. The contractors are also implementing air flow modifications in order to create the proper negative air condition.
10. In March, we began discussions with a member of the Governor's COVID-19 Task Force (who formerly worked for the CDC as an Epidemic Intelligence Service Officer and was Associate Director of Adult Immunizations), along with one of our VAMC Gerontologists and an ASHRAE member related to the benefits of UV lights. We found that the most studied and documented system for killing airborne particles is UV lights and there is an overwhelming amount of information related to its effectiveness. As such, we purchased standalone UV light units for each buildings' corridors and larger spaces (e.g. nursing station, dining area, activities room, therapy room). Since the root of the concern will also be in the staffing areas, we are concentrating the lights in these areas to provide the most benefit. We purchased mobile UV light units for each of the designated isolation rooms in each building. In addition, we purchased a UV light machine to be used to sanitize and optimize our N95 supply, as well as to be used to sanitize staff cell phones, EMR tablets, incoming mail, etc. Furthermore, we purchased each building one unoccupied space quick clean mobile UV light unit. This unit can be used to safely sanitize COVID-19 positive rooms directly following any room becoming vacated.
11. Likewise, there is quite a bit of positive literature on ionization air purification systems being very effective on the control of viruses. Therefore, we are installing an ionization air purification system in all three Homes.
12. The negative pressure, air handler/air flow modifications, and ionization air purification should all be installed and complete on or about April 27, 2020 for each of our buildings. The UV light units should be complete and operating by mid-May 2020.
13. We have added humidification to the room spaces. There are multiple studies identifying that adding humidification to the space has proven to be very effective against the transmission of viruses. From our research, when air is dry there is greater potential for virus droplets to quickly evaporate and the potential to aerosolize. As such, we have purchased air humidifiers along with hygrometers to measure the rooms' RH%.
14. We have been hiring additional staff and increased our staffing level to be prepared should we have a confirmed case within any of our facilities. In addition, hours of work for our essential personnel continue to be utilized beyond our normal routine to ensure we are staying abreast and in front of this pandemic. We have further stayed in close connection and are sharing best practices with community partners, and other partnering state veterans homes and skilled nursing facilities across the country.
15. We have purchased uniform scrubs for every single employee in each facility (maintenance staff have coveralls) to help prevent potential spread and introduction of COVID-19 into the homes. Directly after staff (and contract staff) are screened into the facility, they are required to change out of their personal clothes and into their clean scrubs within designated changing rooms. At the end of the employees' work shifts, they then change out of the scrubs back into their personal clothes. The scrubs and coveralls are then laundered at the facility.

16. We are quarantining all items coming into the building for at least 48 hours and requiring all outside food items purchased through a drive through (coffee, fast food, etc.) to be transferred to a facility provided food container located in our screening area with the original cup/bag/container to be thrown away.
17. We are temporarily supplying all staff and contract staff in the building with a breakfast, lunch or evening meal. We typically only charge employees \$2 a meal so it is a very small amount compared to the benefits. Employees are highly encouraged to not leave the campus to help prevent potential spread and introduction of COVID-19 into the homes. This was also an added effort to help increase morale during these extremely difficult times.
18. We are requiring all staff to wear face masks, at all times, within the Homes. Central Support staff are also required to wear non-medical face masks due to their close vicinity to the Boise Home. Due to the personal protective equipment (PPE) shortages across the nation, we are optimizing and conserving PPE as recommended by CDC.
19. Currently, the Homes have an adequate supply of PPE and we are securing more to ensure we can care for all residents safely while also protecting our staff. We have also received several generous donations of personal protective masks and equipment, in which we wish to thank our community for their love and support to our veterans and to our mission
20. We have devoted a section and made information available on our website related to the coronavirus and we have established a dedicated Update Hotline (208-780-1336) to allow us to easily keep resident families, public, and media up to date with a daily message. We update this recording daily by 5:00 PM MDT.

Please be assured that, in addition to the precautionary efforts described above, the Idaho Division of Veterans Services is following the strictest infectious disease control protocols and the most current guidance of state and federal public health officials.

We remain committed to providing quality care and services, and we continue to welcome your questions and feedback anytime. Should you have any questions, feedback, or concerns, please don't hesitate to reach out to us.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Marv Hagedorn', written over a horizontal line.

Marv Hagedorn
Chief Administrator
Idaho Division of Veterans Services