



Dear Members,

Please read the message below from Secretary Chen to assisted living residents and families, along with the introduction from Patricia Marchetti's email to Executive Directors.

Good morning Assisted Living Residents Directors,

As we enter the winter months, we want to remind everyone of the tools that we have to protect ourselves and each other from severe illnesses like COVID-19, Flu, and RSV. Please distribute the [attached letter](#) from Secretary Chen to your residents and their families, friends, and visitors. If you have any questions, please send any questions to the [@ALR Help \(ELD\)](#) email. Thank you for your dedication to keeping your community healthy and prepared for the upcoming winter months.
Trisha Marchetti

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ELIZABETH C. CHEN, PhD, MBA, MPH
SECRETARY, EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF ELDER AFFAIRS

November 1, 2023

Dear Assisted Living Residents and Families,
As we prepare for the winter respiratory virus season, I am pleased to share that this is the first season where vaccines are available for the three viruses responsible for most severe respiratory illness, hospitalizations, and deaths. Influenza, COVID-19 and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) vaccines can provide life-saving protection against all three viral respiratory diseases. Vaccines protect you and your community from illness, and are especially important for older adults, immunocompromised individuals, and individuals with disabilities who are all at higher risk of severe illness from these diseases.

Getting you and your loved ones all recommended vaccines is the best way to protect against severe illness from influenza, COVID-19, and RSV, especially for those who reside in an Assisted Living Residence.

To limit the spread of respiratory viruses, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) and Executive Office of Elder Affairs (EOEA) strongly recommend the following guidance to protect your loved ones, yourself, and your other family members and caregivers.

Get Vaccinated:

- **Influenza (flu):** Annual flu vaccine is recommended for everyone 6 months of age and older.
- **COVID-19:** The updated COVID-19 vaccine is recommended for everyone 6 months of age and older.
- **RSV:** There are now vaccines available for those most vulnerable to respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), who include older people and infants. CDC recommends that those who are 60 years or older discuss RSV vaccination with their health care

provider. For protection of infants, CDC recommends that certain pregnant people, infants and young children are immunized. You can learn more here: [RSV Immunizations \(CDC\)](#).

1 Full link: <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd/rsv/index.html>

- **Stay Home if You are Sick and Test for COVID-19 and Flu.** Stay home if you are sick. If you are feeling unwell, test for COVID-19 and flu. If you test positive or are diagnosed with any respiratory illness, please postpone visits, continue to stay home, and contact your healthcare provider to discuss treatment options. If you test positive for COVID-19, you may also utilize the state's free telehealth service,² which can quickly provide you with treatment if you meet certain requirements.
- **Wear a Mask:** There may be times when staff and visitors need to wear facemasks in Assisted Living Residences to prevent transmission of respiratory illnesses. Wearing a mask provides protection against the spread of COVID-19 and other respiratory infections, especially when indoors or in crowded spaces, or when interacting with high-risk individuals. Additionally, ALR staff should be able to provide facemasks to any residents or visitors who indicate a preference to wear them. □
Hand Hygiene: Frequent hand hygiene using alcohol-based hand sanitizer or soap and water is an effective way to prevent the spread of germs. Use and encourage hand hygiene for your loved one, especially when you visit your loved one's residence.
- **Cover Your Cough or Sneeze:** Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw used tissues in the trash. If you do not have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your elbow, not your hands. Remember to immediately wash your hands after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.

Thank you for your ongoing support of the health and safety of your loved ones as the DPH and EOEA continue efforts to protect all residents of our Commonwealth.

Sincerely,



Elizabeth C. Chen, PhD, MBA, MPH
Secretary, Executive Office of Elder Affairs

2 Full link: mass.gov/covidtelehealth or call the hotline: 833-450-346.



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