

## Covid-19 and Potomac Valley's Response

### How we're building upon our successful infection control strategies in the age of Novel Coronavirus.

*'Shelter in place.'* *'Social distancing.'*  
*Singing "Happy Birthday" twice*  
*while washing your hands.*

The Novel Coronavirus (Covid-19) has caused people the world over to learn new terminology and pay even greater attention to the thoroughness of their personal hygiene. As we learn more about Covid-19 we should anticipate hearing these expressions for quite awhile.

#### Nursing facilities & Covid-19

It is not surprising that one of the first clusters of Covid-19 occurred within a nursing facility (Washington state). The elderly are more likely to have chronic conditions or compromised immune systems, increasing their vulnerability to a virus. Covid-19 all presented with many of the physical symptoms of influenza (ex., cough, fever, sore throat).

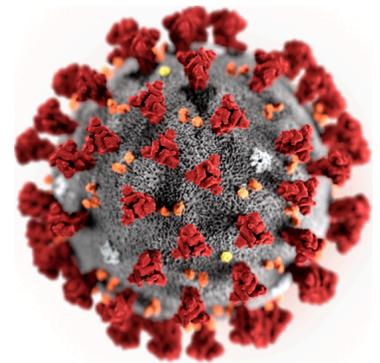
#### Potomac Valley's Strategies

Among Potomac Valley's first Covid-19 responses was a comparison of our current infection control practices and how they may need to be revised for this new virus (especially in respect to 'droplet' precautions).

Led by Ellie Willard, Potomac Valley's Director of Nursing, and Rose Hoover, our facility's Infection Preventionist, significant communication with facility team members provided information about why Covid-19 required unique strategies in preventing transmission.

Describes Ellie, "Covid-19 is a 'gamechanger'. There is no vaccine to prevent getting the virus and it can mask itself initially as another illness."

One of the first organizations to provide guidance was the American



Health Care Association (AHCA), the country's largest organization of long-term and post-acute care providers. Based upon their recommendations, confirmed later from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and National Institutes

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of Health (NIH), Potomac Valley had already suspended visits from families/friends (except in end-of-life situations).

Here are further steps we've taken to protect both residents and staff:

- screening persons entering Potomac Valley—including staff—for possible exposure to Covid-19, as well as any fever or respiratory symptoms;
- inquiring whether staff work at other facilities and requesting them to wash their hands and face, as well as change their uniform prior to entering PV;
- canceling group activities, both within and outside Potomac Valley;
- relocating any resident with symptoms of Covid-19 to an appropriate room for monitoring;
- rigorously screening potential new residents prior to their acceptance by Potomac Valley. A few of the areas of inquiry contained within Potomac Valley's two-page Covid-19 Screening Tool concern the individual's social history, any current Covid-19 investigation status, occurrence of Covid-19 in previous living situation, recent travel by the potential resident and/or family members, and current symptoms (ex., fever, cough, shortness of breath);
- increasing facility cleaning frequency;
- providing in-room meal service to all residents (a staff member will assist those unable to feed themselves/need assistance);
- encouraging families and residents to use social media to maintain contact with their loved one. Our Life Enrichment team is providing assistance in this regard. (See our back page!)
- using telemedicine, by which specialty medical care can be provided;
- performing resident temperature checks & respiratory wellness monitoring on each shift;
- closing the employee break room (staff will take breaks on own unit);
- expanding the rehab gym into the auditorium to allow for greater distance between residents during therapy sessions;
- allowing only essential external medical appointments;
- suspending resident leave of absence;
- providing nebulizer treatments only when deemed essential.

## Time to break the habit! Stop touching your face!

Covid-19 has created more incentive than ever for you to break the habit. The virus is carried on surfaces and can linger on our hands.

How often do people touch their faces? Apparently A LOT!

Let's start by referencing a 2015 study by the Journal of Occupational and Environmental Hygiene.

Using medical students as the test subjects In the study, the average number of times a hand touched the face was **23 per hour!**

Forty-four percent of these face touches involved contact with a mucous membrane (nose, mouth, eyes).

Beyond thoroughly and frequently washing your hands, staying at least 6 feet from others, and self-quarantining (to the extent possible), it is **vital** you stop your face-touch frequency.

What can help you stop?

- **Find something else to do with your hands.** Buy a stress ball or a fidget spinner to keep them busy.
- **Wear a visual cue.** Some people are wearing rubber bands, bulky bracelets, or painting a bright color on just their thumbnails to draw attention to what they're about to do.
- **Put up some signs.** A bunch of Post-It notes with **DON'T TOUCH MY FACE!** on them can help. Place them where you spend a lot of time each day.

- **Enlist others to help you.** Make it a family project. Call out when someone is about to touch their face.
- **See if the itch passes**—most do in less than 30 seconds. IF you can't stand it, use a clean tissue as a barrier between hand and face!



INFORMATION FROM JOHNS HOPKINS MEDICINE	Covid-19	Seasonal Influenza
Cough, fever, body aches; sometimes vomiting and diarrhea	YES	YES
Mild, severe, or fatal	YES	YES
Can result in pneumonia	YES	YES
Spread person to person from coughing, sneezing, or talking	YES	YES
Spread through airborne route (meaning tiny droplets in the air could spread the virus even after infected person is no longer there)	MAYBE	NO
Spread by infected person days before their symptoms appear	YES	YES
Treatable by antibiotics	NO	NO
Vaccine	NO	YES
Preventable by frequent hand washing, social distancing, coughing into crook of elbow, staying home.	YES	YES



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## From the Administrator's desk.

One of the subjects in my first quarter newsletter column was about our *remarkable* and *dedicated* staff.

### Covid-19 now gives those words new meaning.

Our entire team is working to keep it out of our facility every moment they are at work. We know that Covid-19 is much more deadly to elderly people. Early indications are that we haven't seen the worst of this virus across our country and the world.

Today, March 30th, Montgomery County has 341 confirmed cases of Covid-19—the highest percentage in the State of Maryland. Maryland's Governor Hogan has directed, through an executive order, that all Marylanders (except for essential individuals) stay-in-place starting at 8pm tonight.

Potomac Valley suspended all visits by family and friends over two weeks ago, except under end-of-life circumstances. **Senior care was early** in recognizing the upcoming battle with Covid-19 and to galvanize our profession to quick action.

On a much more positive note, in April we celebrate the work of Occupational Therapists (month-long), National Nurses Week (May 6-12), National Skilled Nursing Home Week (May 10-16), and National Nursing Assistant Week (June 18-24).

As a last thought in this issue, my wish is that all Americans **stay safe, stay healthy, and stay home (if possible)**.

*Together* we'll all get through this.



## Use Technology to Stay in Touch With Your Loved One!

There are many ways to visit at Potomac Valley!

With the Life Enrichment team you can schedule a brief virtual visit! We can use Facetime or other social media platform.

Simply call in and speak with Boyet DeLa Cruz, Director of Life Enrichment at 301-762-0700.



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