LeadingAge Washington

FROM THE DESK OF

DEB MURPHY - CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, MPA, JD

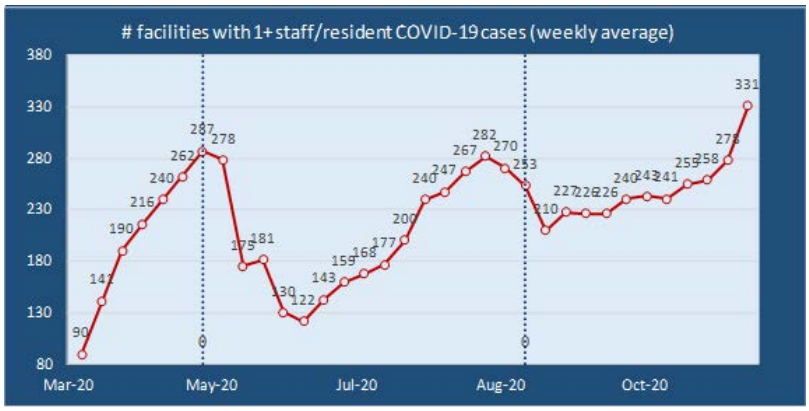
November 24, 2020

Dear Residents, Family, Friends & Staff of LeadingAge member facilities,

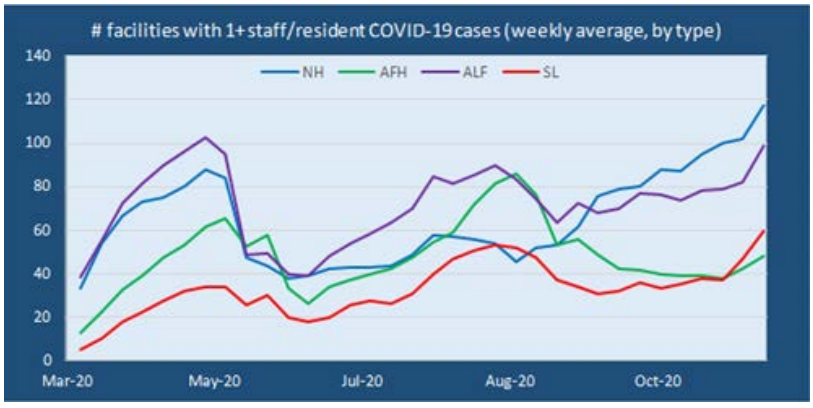
I'm writing on behalf of LeadingAge Washington, a state-wide association of mission-driven organizations dedicated to improving the aging experience of over 50,000 older Washingtonians and their family members. My message is both very simple and very challenging:

At this time, when we typically gather to share long-held family traditions celebrating Thanksgiving, please be safe and *don't gather together*. Celebrate with loved ones, virtually. The risk of bringing moms and dads, or grandmoms and grandads, home is too great, they are most at risk of contracting and dying from this virus. Please choose to keep them safe.

As we move indoors and the virus continues to spread in the surrounding community, the number of COVID cases in nursing homes and assisted living and adult family homes is also increasing. The graph below shows that the confirmed positive COVID case rate is higher now than it was at the height of the virus outbreak last March.



The number of skilled nursing facilities with one or more confirmed cases of COVID now exceeds the number of affected facilities in March. And the number of assisted living communities with at least one confirmed case of COVID, while lower than it was in March, is trending in the wrong direction.



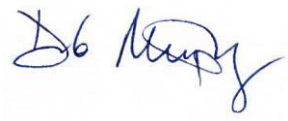
As the virus spreads within the greater community, it more easily finds its way into congregate senior care facilities. Once the virus enters, it can quickly and unknowingly spread from visitors to staff or residents, or from staff to residents. This can happen, as we've learned, despite adherence to proper infection control protocols. As a result, facilities' most significant challenge is staffing.

Across our state, in all long term care communities like this one, our nurses and certified nursing assistants, our administrators and environmental staff, our social workers and our dietary staff, and others are weary. They are emotionally and physically worn out. They have a seemingly impossible job of trying to protect staff and care for those at the highest risk of contracting this virus. These passionate professionals fear they will lose more staff and more residents to this virus despite their best work. Some feel they are nearing a breaking point but are committed to holding on, day by day, praying for the vaccine to arrive.

We understand that residents have a legal right to leave the facility to enjoy the Thanksgiving holiday with family. To do so, they must either quarantine for 14 days prior to leaving or quarantine for 7 days and have a negative test within 48 hours of departure. Few communities can afford to cover the cost of the COVID test for the purpose of letting residents spend the holiday with family. More troubling than that, however, is the increased risk of exposure residents will face if they do spend the holiday with family at home. And that risk is then passed on to roommates and/or other residents and the staff that care for them.

So let me repeat my appeal: **At this time, when we typically gather to share long-held family traditions celebrating Thanksgiving, please be safe and *don't gather together*.** Celebrate with loved ones, virtually. The risk of bringing moms and dads, or grandmoms and grandads, home is too great, they are most at risk of contracting and dying from this virus. Please choose to keep them safe.

And when you do leave your home, please wear a mask, stay physically distanced from others, and practice vigilant hand washing. Reducing the transmission of the virus in your community, reduces the risk of spreading the virus in nursing homes and assisted living communities. We, the long term care providers of Washington State, are doing our best, we ask you to do your best.

We are *thankful* for the promise of a vaccine, *thankful* for this community of dedicated and caring staff and *thankful f*or those we are blessed to serve.

Happy Thanksgiving to all as we find new ways to celebrate together, but apart, this year.