

Antigen tests – how do we use them? CDC has released general guidance. Talks about how it is most effective with folks who are in the first few days of symptoms (highest viral load). If you are on day 5 of your infection, you may not have a viral load that is high enough to be detected on an antigen test. These tests are very accurate for positive tests. Even though they are not as sensitive as PCR test, they are still very helpful in screening as long as you use them for repeat testing. If you are following CDC guidance and testing weekly or more frequently, it is helpful.

Do we have to use the POC antigen testing devices? No, but. First, you must have a back up strategy. You are not required to use the devices that HHS is sending out. But if you have a device, and you choose not to use it, and don't have an alternate plan in place, this could be a problem. Also, CMS says that you need to have a plan for accessing rapid results testing. We know that PCR testing through a lab is taking several days throughout the country – sometimes over a week. This may be something that surveyors would look at.

Remember – even if you do not use the POC device for COVID, they are very reliable for flu and strep.

Should we exclude from work healthcare personnel who have symptoms, sneezing, coughing, but they are due to a cold or allergies? Yes, you should. You do not know that it is not COVID-19. Also, no one should be working sick, regardless of why they are sick. Want to be sure we are taking all safety precautions. Even if it feels like just allergies, it could be a cold, flu, or COVID.

What about this training that is required to access Provider Relief Funds? How many people have to take it? If we have a preventionist, do we still have to take it? We still don't know. Anyone who says that they know, is not fully informed. We have heard that it would not be the full 23-hour training, that it might be more condensed, but now we have heard that this may have changed. We have not yet heard anything official from HHS.

1135 Waivers- Is the 3 day stay waiver still in effect? We have not heard anything from CMS that this waiver is ending. The public health emergency was extended until October.

Do I need to have direct COVID impact to use the 3-day waiver? No. This applies to anyone. Anyone who qualifies for skilled care can utilize this.

Plastic sheeting/plexiglass that you are using to designate COVID unit from the rest of the facility. Is this still allowed? Remember, there is the temporary construction waiver. That waiver allows you to use construction methods that you would normally not be able to use. We reached out to our life safety experts on this. You should still refer to your local ordinances to make sure that the way you are doing things specifically.

Who should we be letting in? Fire Marshall? The HVAC technician? You need to make the best decision that you can for your building, keeping in mind the health and safety of your residents. Make sure you are screening everyone, including surveyors! Do not allow them in the building without being screened.