

## COVID-19 Vaccines And Long Term Care

After an unprecedented year battling the COVID-19 pandemic, the vaccines represent a long-awaited turning point for residents and staff in long term care facilities. Weekly cases are at record lows, continuing to brighten that light at the end of the tunnel. The American Health Care Association and National Center for Assisted Living (AHCA/NCAL) have answered some of the most common questions about vaccination efforts in long term care facilities, including vaccination rates, vaccine hesitancy, reporting and when facilities will return to normal.

### What are the Current Vaccination Rates in Nursing Homes?

After the first round of on-site vaccination clinics in nursing homes, [the CDC found](#) that 77.8% of residents and 37.5% of staff received their first dose. We're hearing anecdotally that these numbers were increasing with each round of clinics, and a [survey from OnShift](#) demonstrates that willingness to get the vaccine among staff has increased by 94% since December.

AHCA and LeadingAge announced a [nationwide goal](#) to get 75% of the approximately 1.5 million staff members working in nursing homes vaccinated by June 30, 2021.

### Why are Some Long Term Care Staff Hesitant to Get the Vaccine?

Staff members in long term care facilities are reflective of their communities, and their feelings about the vaccine mirror much of the [general public](#) and [other health care workers](#). They were among the very first to get the vaccine, and a lot of staff preferred to "wait and see" how the vaccines went. There is also a lot of misinformation on social media, so we need a united effort to combat misinformation and give people the facts.

AHCA/NCAL launched the [#GetVaccinated campaign](#) in December to encourage all residents, families and staff members to consent to the vaccine as well as provide credible information to help them make an informed decision. We are hopeful that through ongoing outreach, individuals in long term care will learn that these vaccines are safe and effective and the best hope we have for ending the pandemic.

### Should the Vaccine Be Mandated in Long Term Care?

Each employer and state will make a decision that is best for their circumstances. We're focused on educational efforts to improve vaccine confidence.

### What Other Methods or Incentives Work?

We have found that individuals are more likely to trust a medical professional or a friend or colleague about whether to get the vaccine. Long term care providers have hosted [town halls and information sessions](#), often with medical professionals, that allow individuals to ask their specific questions and address any concerns.

Every single caregiver has a unique perspective and reason for getting or not getting the vaccine, so we also want to give providers the tools they need to have direct conversations with employees and address their specific concerns head on. It is critical that we listen, seek to understand, and then thoughtfully dispel myths and provide the facts.

After surveying our member providers with high vaccination rates, we developed a [resource](#) that compiles a number of methods that appear to be effective in increasing uptake.

### Why Aren't Vaccination Rates in Nursing Homes Reported Publicly?

On April 8, 2021, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) announced mandating vaccination reporting for nursing homes in a [proposed rule](#), which would not go into effect until October 1, 2021.

From the very beginning, we have supported efforts to publicly report COVID-19 vaccination rates in nursing homes, and we appreciate policymakers who have recently echoed this call.

We believe transparency on vaccination rates should be expanded to all Medicare providers, including hospitals, home health, and inpatient rehabilitation facilities, where many of our nation's seniors may also receive care and the virus can still remain a threat. All Medicare providers should have a streamlined effort to report their vaccination rates, and consumers should be able to easily access that information.

We also encourage assisted living communities to report their rates to their state health departments and that all long term care facilities be transparent with residents, families and other stakeholders about their vaccination rates.

As we've said repeatedly, knowledge is power, especially during a pandemic. Reporting vaccination rates is critical to facilitating in-person visitations in nursing homes, tracking the effectiveness of the vaccines, and empowering potential residents and family members in their decision-making process. It's also critical that we know whether we met our [industry-wide goal](#).

### Is Long Term Care Having Any Challenges with Accessing the Vaccine?

After the [three rounds of on-site clinics](#), it was unclear how long term care facilities would be able to quickly access vaccines moving forward. We [called on public health officials](#) in early March to ensure long term care is prioritized for a steady, ongoing allocation of vaccines. We need to ensure the vaccine is readily available for new admissions and hires as well as current staff and residents who have since decided to get the vaccine.

As of May, we're hearing that this is getting better, with some vaccine being allocated to long term care. But this is something we're going to keep an eye on. We need to remain vigilant and keep long term care residents and staff a priority as everyone's attention shifts to the general population. We've seen what [amazing progress](#) can be made when we prioritize this vulnerable population.

## Will Nursing Homes Get Back to 'Normal' If Everyone is Vaccinated?

Nursing homes and other long term care facilities will not be able to go back to “normal” for some time, but providers are doing everything they can to safely facilitate activities that are beneficial to residents (e.g., in-person visits with family members, communal dining, and enriching social and physical activities).

We are not out of the woods yet, and we must remain vigilant until we fully understand how effective the vaccines are among our population, especially in light of new variants. That’s why in February, [we asked the CDC](#) to focus research on the vaccines’ impact in long term care.

Getting back to “normal” probably won’t occur at least until we achieve herd immunity among the general population. Researchers have found that [spread in the community](#) is linked to nursing home outbreaks. The sooner we all get vaccinated, the sooner we can hopefully end this pandemic and bring back some sense of normalcy. It’s up to all of us, not just residents and staff.

But we also know that we can do better than a return to normal. Residents and staff deserve to be made an ongoing priority so that something like COVID-19 never happens again. [Learn more about how we can improve America’s nursing homes.](#)

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