

**Updated 12/21/20**

Dear Members of the Austen Riggs Center Community:

I'm writing to inform you that two staff members have tested positive for the virus that causes COVID-19 since my last update.

One was detected through our regular screening on Thursday, Dec. 17. This person, who is a member of our housekeeping team, has reported no symptoms and is in isolation off-campus. We have notified all patients and staff, and our contact tracing program identified all the colleagues who were in close enough contact with that staff member to warrant entering quarantine.

A second staff member on the nursing staff informed us about receiving a positive COVID test outside the Riggs screening process. That colleague, who reports having mild symptoms, had already been in quarantine off campus since December 4 because of exposure to a family member who tested positive. Our contact tracing has determined this person was not in close contact with staff or patients during any infectious period.

These two people will remain in isolation off campus until authorized to return. The staff member I mentioned in my last update who was in isolation has been approved to return to work.

I also wanted to share an important update regarding vaccines. State health officials have indicated the Center will most likely be among the early recipients of the COVID-19 vaccine. Congregate living facilities like Riggs are identified as part of Phase 1 of vaccine distribution. We are still in discussions with state health authorities to get additional information regarding when that might happen and whether we will receive the Pfizer or Moderna version.

With the understanding it is possible that Riggs could get our allotment in the next few weeks, we have organized educational seminars about the vaccines for all Riggs patients and staff. These presentations, scheduled for January 5 and 7, will be offered by Heather Forouhar Graff, MD, who has been serving since the outbreak of the pandemic as the Center's Infection Control Physician.

To date, we have not had a single patient test positive for the virus. I believe that reflects the careful precautions we have undertaken as a community. While we cannot and shall not put aside the protocols that have kept us safe thus far, the arrival of the vaccines marks the beginning of the end of the pandemic.

My thanks for your support, and stay well.

Eric M. Plakun, MD  
Medical Director/CEO