

National Guard deployed to Pennsylvania nursing home stricken by COVID-19 outbreak

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A Delaware County nursing home, located in the southeastern part of Pennsylvania, bordering Philadelphia, has been plagued by COVID-19, forcing county officials to ask the governor for help from National Guard nurses and medics last Saturday.

The chairman of Delaware County Council, Brian Zidek, issued a public statement saying, “We understand the challenges that many long-term care facilities such as the Broomall Rehabilitation and Nursing Center are facing right now, and together with support from the Chester County Health Department we are doing everything we can to support the staff, patients and their loved ones.”

The Pennsylvania National Guard responded by sending 18 military nurses and medics to the Broomall Rehabilitation and Nursing Center in Maple Township to assist the staff. Neither county nor state officials have provided information on the number of infected patients but said the center needed help “due to current staffing shortages.” According to officials, the team is supposed to provide routine care for “non-acute” patients for only three days.

Massachusetts and Florida have also deployed National Guard nurses and medics to fight the virus.

The Broomall center, according to federal data, lacks adequate staffing and beds for residents. Nurses are overworked, only being able to care for each resident 35 minutes each day. This is below the total inadequate Pennsylvania average of just 48 minutes per resident. To save money and boost profits, nursing homes have replaced registered nurses with low-paid and overworked aides who have few benefits and often no sick time.

The facility houses 248 residents per day with 298

certified beds. The average Pennsylvania nursing facility serves around 110 residents.

Nursing homes have been among the institutions hardest hit by the coronavirus. Tight quarters and communal living spaces act like Petri dishes for the virus. Older people have been particularly vulnerable to the virus, especially those with underlying health conditions.

A nursing home in Beaver County in western Pennsylvania tragically found that all 800 patients and staff have contracted the virus, while in New Jersey, 17 corpses were found piled in a small morgue only built to hold four bodies maximum. Horrific scenes such as these will forever be embedded in the consciousness of the American public.

A state investigation of the Beaver County facility in November 2019 found numerous health code violations and warned that the management was not following proper procedures to prevent the spread of infectious diseases.

According to CBS3 Philadelphia, COVID-19 deaths in nursing homes make up the majority of deaths in county-wide mortality counts: Delaware County has 68 of 99 deaths in these facilities; in Montgomery County, 138 deaths were in nursing homes out of a total 184 deaths, equaling 75 percent; Chester County, 68 percent; Bucks County, 58 percent; and Philadelphia, 54 percent.

On April 14, the *New York Times* identified 2,500 nursing homes across the US that have been impacted by the virus, concluding that more than 21,000 residents and staff contracted it, resulting in 3,800 deaths. This horrific number is undoubtedly an undercount, as many people who have died were never

tested.

Outside of Pennsylvania, some of the hardest hit nursing homes are in Virginia, New England, and Florida. While doctors, nurses and aides have been heroically fighting the virus, putting themselves at extreme risk and sacrificing their lives to save others, President Donald Trump initially called the virus a hoax and insisted that it would just go away. He is now pushing for a reckless reopening of the economy that will lead to a second wave of infections, even as the pandemic continues to rage.

Both parties, Democrats and Republicans, have refused to provide enough funding for health care, even with many warnings from scientists about the potential of a catastrophically deadly pandemic. Nurses and other health care workers still lack necessary personal protective equipment (PPE), the country doesn't have enough tests, and contact tracing is in its initial stages.

Many families with loved ones in these nursing homes, however, have condemned the government's negligent response to contain it. Speaking to CBS3, Angela Galiety, whose parents in a nearby facility contracted the virus but since have recovered, said, "I'm outraged the numbers are that high. For the past five weeks, I feel like I've been screaming and no one has been listening to me. They are not doing enough for our seniors and our loved ones in these care facilities. I was shocked to learn that the only treatment they are providing once these residents show symptoms is rest, liquid, and acetaminophen. Our seniors do not stand a chance."

Pennsylvania Governor Tom Wolf, a Democrat, has extended stay-at-home orders to May 8, after which parts of the economy will open, including construction projects, creating the possibility for a second-wave surge in cases. The Republican-controlled legislature, meanwhile, passed several bills, vetoed by Wolf, to reopen sections of the economy immediately by empowering county officials and business owners who follow guidelines from the CDC and US Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency.

As of this writing, Pennsylvania has more than 35,600 cases and 1,622 deaths from the coronavirus, nudging ahead of Michigan and Illinois to ignominiously place fifth behind New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts and California.

On April 21, 1,294 new cases were reported in

Pennsylvania. This is lower than the peak days of nearly 2,000 new cases a day, but up sharply from the day before when the state recorded 948 new cases.



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