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Dear Aspire Community,

I hope you and your family are off to a healthy, happy start to 2022.

Once again, the pandemic has shifted. In the past month, the COVID-19 variant has caused the number of cases, exposures, and quarantines to skyrocket. Across all industries, operations have been disrupted because of staff illness and absence.

In the healthcare sector, there are nursing homes being staffed by the national guard, group homes that have closed or consolidated, and hospitals unable to staff the beds they need. Schools are struggling to put teachers in classrooms and drivers on buses. Our programs are at risk.

There is some hope that cases will peak before the end of January, but the future is unknown. As you know, we cannot simply cancel or delay our services like a business. People's needs do not go away.

Following new CDC guidance, Aspire is changing its policies for masking, quarantine, and isolation. We know that these changes may be confusing, even upsetting, as we all search for some normalcy and consistency in our lives. We have no choice but to respond as the pandemic evolves.

Omicron spreads so easily that it is likely that you will encounter someone who is infected anywhere you go, including work. Like other variants, people who are positive are often asymptomatic. Omicron is also most infectious before symptoms occur.

Because of this, **Aspire now requires that every employee wear an N95, KN95, or equivalent, mask supplied by Aspire while at work.** We must now assume that exposure can occur at any time.

We also know that boosters are essential protection against severe disease for those who received their second dose of vaccine more than 5 months ago. The protection from the original vaccine drops to one-third of its original effectiveness against Omicron. After a booster, protection goes back up to 75% of the original effectiveness.

If you've been boosted, please send your updated vaccination cards to vaxbox@allinc.org. **We urge you to get a booster if you qualify and haven't already.** We have on-site booster clinics scheduled throughout the month. Watch for a separate email on these, or contact your supervisor right away for dates and registration.

The CDC has revised its guidance for quarantine and isolation for both the general public and healthcare settings. This revision is based on two things. One is that Omicron appears to have a shorter time course for both infection and illness. The other is that the huge case numbers and quarantine/isolation recommendations are dangerously disrupting operations throughout the healthcare system.

We are following this new CDC guidance. The guidance varies based on the staffing situation in a program. **If workforce shortages are anticipated, COVID-positive employees who are asymptomatic or recovering can return to work after 5 days. If workforce shortages reach crisis levels where we would be unable to provide services, COVID-positive employees with mild or no symptoms can continue to work.**

We will tell you if crisis conditions are occurring in your program. Assignments during crisis conditions will be made on a case by case basis, evaluating risk versus benefit. Please consult your supervisor about current conditions. Remember that **diligent use of KN95 or N95 masking and following all precautions protect everyone's safety.** Omicron is present in our programs whether people test positive or not.

For employees who have known unprotected exposures to COVID, the guidance varies based on vaccination status. Those who have received boosters do not have to quarantine at all. All others may work as long as they test negative prior to return and again on day 5. Under crisis conditions, testing can be delayed if unavailable.

If you received an exemption from the vaccine mandate or are exposed to COVID and need to test, you may use an at-home test as an acceptable form of testing to come to work.

[Read Aspire's work restrictions for employees with COVID or exposures.](#)

Together we can continue to keep our community as safe as possible. Thank you for all your efforts. What you do each day ensures the health and wellbeing of each person we support as well as everyone around us.

Best regards,



Lou Giramma, CEO

