

# Timely information and guidance – COVID-19 assistance for long term care facilities



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The Nebraska Infection Control Assessment and Promotion Program (ICAP), funded by Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services to provide technical assistance to healthcare facilities across Nebraska, established an ongoing webinar series, provided one-on-one consultation, and expanded resources for long term care facility staff to promote infection prevention and control activities.

## The “What”

On January 30, 2020, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recorded the first instance of person-to-person spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus in the United States. On March 5, 2020 – just 36 days later – the U.S. had already confirmed 164 cases, and the Nebraska ICAP provided its first COVID-19 webinar for Long Term Care (LTC) facilities.



LTC residents are mostly elderly with many having underlying health conditions, and the spread of infectious diseases is always a concern within congregate living facilities. LTC facilities can be understaffed and undertrained to control infectious diseases. COVID-19 created a formidable challenge for the staff, residents, and their families.

Nebraska ICAP successfully leveraged webinars to provide critical guidance to LTC facilities and build relationships to promote infection prevention and control (IPC). Nebraska ICAP is supported by the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Healthcare Associated Infections and Antimicrobial Resistance (HAI/AR) Program through Epidemiology and Laboratory Capacity for the Prevention and Control of Emerging Infectious Diseases (ELC) funding. Nebraska ICAP is a collaborative effort of University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC), Nebraska Medicine (teaching hospital for UNMC) and Nebraska DHHS which has rapidly expanded since its start in 2015. It represents an academic/public partnership to combine resources and expertise to meet the needs of healthcare facilities and communities in Nebraska. ICAP’s experienced infection preventionists (IPs), infectious disease trained medical directors, and professional educators offer peer-to-peer IPC assessments and training to healthcare providers. COVID-19 created an urgent need to create significant support programs specific to LTC outbreak readiness and just-in time outbreak management support, and ICAP built a coordinated support network with partner organizations such as the nursing home associations and local health departments.



More stories are available at [stories.cste.org](https://stories.cste.org)

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The LTC webinar series has been a valuable tool to help LTC professionals stay current with the ever-changing landscape of COVID-19 and other IPC topics. ICAP has conducted **more than 140 LTC webinars with an average of 267 participants.**

### The “So What”

ICAP’s LTC webinar series has been focused on COVID-19 and IPC best practices. The webinars provide a review of new CDC and Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services information and guidance, present applicable use cases and solutions, and provide opportunities for participants to have their questions answered in real time (an average of 27 questions are asked during each webinar). The LTC webinar series has been a valuable tool to help LTC professionals stay current with the ever-changing landscape of COVID-19 and other IPC topics. ICAP has conducted more than 140 LTC webinars with an average of 267 participants. Additional LTC staff access the recorded sessions on the ICAP website (<https://icap.nebraskamed.com>).

In addition to critical and timely IPC information, the webinars informed LTC professionals about other available services and support, including 1:1 consultation with a trained IP. With each interaction, ICAP learned more about the facility’s unique situation and needs. Whether the LTC facility had an IP, or the duties were assigned to individuals with other responsibilities, the ICAP IP communicated IPC guidance in an easy-to-understand manner that fit the facility’s individual situation and need.

As an example, ICAP created a COVID-19 containment zone strategy for LTC facilities with color coding to help the facilities implement recommendations using a standard strategy that could be implemented in either a specific area or throughout the building, depending on the exposure history or outbreak severity. Like much of the guidance during the pandemic, the zoning guidance evolved based on the latest information. The most up to date zoning guidance has always been available 24/7 on the ICAP website.

ICAP also created a process to leverage daily LTC COVID-19 case data from the National Healthcare Safety Network and state-level reporting. The data was compiled and reviewed each morning to identify facilities experiencing an outbreak. If the facility had not already contacted ICAP (inbound calls were handled during office hours, after-hours, and on the weekends), an ICAP IP would proactively contact the facility to assess the situation and provide assistance. Containment strategies, personal protective equipment use, testing protocols, and treatment needs were all discussed on a typical call. ICAP has assisted more than 400 LTC facilities since the beginning of COVID-19.

### The “Now What”

ICAP’s webinar series launch at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic provided critical information to the LTC facilities, and it helped build relationships to promote better IPC practices. Nebraska’s LTC facilities were not only better equipped to manage and control the spread of COVID-19, but they also had more training and experience to better handle other infectious diseases. They now have direct access to subject matter experts for discussing any challenges in IPC program implementation. Training and guidance provided by Nebraska ICAP, which was made possible through the ELC funding, played a major role in saving lives in Nebraska.

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