

# Quality improvement related to infection prevention and control at New Jersey Veterans Memorial Home at Menlo Park



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CATEGORY: **Epidemiology and Laboratory Capacity (ELC)**

The New Jersey Department of Health Infection Control Assessment and Response Unit assisted the New Jersey Veterans Memorial Home at Menlo Park contain an ongoing COVID-19 outbreak. The unit provided on-site assessment to provide feedback and implement mitigation measures.



## The “What”

The New Jersey Veterans Memorial Home at Menlo Park cares for veterans who were honorably discharged from U.S. war or peacetime services, the veteran's spouse, and spouses and parents of members of the military who were killed in action during a period of war (Gold Star Parent).

In November 2022, the New Jersey Veterans Memorial Home at Menlo Park received media attention about federal authorities threatening to cut off payment due to graphically detailed medical errors and improper infection controls at the facility that reported some of the highest COVID-19-related death tolls in the nation. The drastic sanctions came after inspectors cited the facility for putting some of its residents in "immediate jeopardy" following charges of improper care and abuse, which could force a shutdown of a 312-bed nursing home. A finding of immediate jeopardy signifies a threat to residents' health, safety, and lives.

This prompted the New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH) Infection Control Assessment and Response (ICAR) Unit to assist the facility by spending two days in December 2022 on-site focused on resident and health care personnel safety and quality improvement related to infection prevention and control (IPC). The ICAR Unit uses Epidemiology and Laboratory Capacity for the Prevention and Control of Emerging Infectious Diseases (ELC) funding to hire and retain several key positions that focus on this work, including a nurse infection preventionist and epidemiologists. The two-day on-site assessment was focused on COVID-19



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containment and overall IPC, including IPC program and infrastructure, hand hygiene, transmission-based precautions, personal protective equipment, prevention of device-related infections, injection safety, emerging respiratory pathogens, environmental cleaning, surveillance, disease reporting and outbreak prevention, antimicrobial stewardship, and health care personnel infection prevention competency-based training. Immediate feedback and mitigation measures were provided on-site, with a comprehensive written summary report to follow.

### The “So What”

In February 2023, the NJDOH Survey and Licensure Division permitted the New Jersey Veterans Memorial Home at Menlo Park to accept new admissions after reinspection, demonstrating improvement in infection control strategies and key personnel changes.

The New Jersey Veterans Memorial Home at Menlo Park first reported its COVID-19 outbreak on November 24, 2021. As of April 12, 2023, there was a total of 122 COVID-19 confirmed resident cases and 304 COVID-19 confirmed staff cases. There were 51 resident cases and 66 staff cases reported during the last quarter of 2022. Since the NJDOH interventions in December 2022, the first quarter of 2023 case counts have decreased to four resident cases and 31 staff cases, representing a 92% and 53% decrease in cases, respectively.

### The “Now What”

The prevention-focused assessments outlined in the ELC cooperative agreement focus on high acuity, post-acute care settings. With this in mind, internal collaboration with other NJDOH divisions has highlighted an opportunity to engage a subset of health care facilities with an urgent need for support. Additionally, the focus on health equity and outcomes in long-term care facilities has increased legislation proposals, including two of the New Jersey veterans homes, which saw a high number of deaths related to COVID-19, with mandatory upgrades to require conversion of at least one ward to single-occupancy rooms (Bill A4923: <https://www.njleg.state.nj.us/bill-search/2022/A4923/bill-text?f=A5000&n=4923> 11).

Key contributors to this project include Rebecca Greeley, New Jersey Department of Health.