

Public Health Partnership with Academia to address SARS-CoV-2 in five Long Term Care Facilities in Newark, New Jersey.

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Background: Beginning April 2020, Long Term Care Facilities (LTCs) in New Jersey experienced high SARS-CoV-2 transmission and mortality. The Newark Department of Health and Community Wellness (NDHCW) began aggressive engagement with active surveillance for Covid illness in residents and staff of the five LTCs in Newark. It was determined that LTCs lacked adequate PPE, staff, pandemic infection control protocols and accurate data collection system.

Methods: Starting June 2020, Rutgers' Department of Preventive Medicine created a public health partnership with NDHCW and established a team with volunteer students from New Jersey Medical School (NJMS) and Rutgers School of Public Health (SPH) to boost the public health communications with the five LTCs in Newark city and address their needs mentioned above in a more systematic way and an active surveillance. Students monitored numbers of cases in residents and staff, reviewed the LTCs' pandemic plan, and were available to the LTCs for information about how to obtain more PPE, obtain and perform point of care testing and later on, vaccination supplies.

Results: Two volunteer students were assigned to each LTC to review daily clinical line-listings of Covid-19 positive cases (residents and staff), also to contact the facilities by email or phone to receive updates on Covid-19 cases, needs, concerns and challenges. The students reported to the team through email and weekly virtual team meetings. A weekly report on Covid-19 cases and vaccination status (added in December 2020) was sent to the executives at NDHCW. A Preventive Medicine Resident was team leader, training new students as needed, running the weekly team meetings, monitoring weekly epidemic curves and creating the reports.

Conclusion: This team provided support for the limited resources of a local health department.

Public Health Implications: Public health/academic partnership increased the capacity of a local health department to track SARS-CoV-2 outbreaks and provide technical guidance for infection control in five Long term Care Facilities (LTCs) in the city of Newark, New Jersey.