

IMPORTANT: Coronavirus (COVID-19) Update – April 20, 2020

To: Our Minnesota Communities - Residents and Their Family Members

The Waters Leadership Response to the COVID-19 Exposures

When it became apparent that COVID-19 had made its way to America, leadership at The Waters, a national owner and operator of senior living communities in Minnesota, Wisconsin and Pennsylvania, sprang into action. The goal in mind, to stay ahead of the curve.

By March 3, three days before Minnesota’s Department of Health confirmed the state’s first case of COVID-19, The Waters had already put its own proactive COVID-19 plan into place to reduce the likelihood of any spread of the virus. Protocols had been pre-determined and staff at all 11 of the company’s operating communities trained on what to do if a case was diagnosed in the community. Efforts to educate residents on daily hygiene and environmental safety practices were also underway. Posters reminding people to practice good hygiene had been put up in all the communities, and common areas and “high touch points” were being disinfected multiple times per day.

Where We Have Been - Implementation Timeline of Precautionary Measures

On March 12 - The Waters began screening visitors, limiting large-scale community events, and either postponing or cancelling planned offsite excursions.

On March 16 - The Waters began further limiting and screening visitors based upon guidance from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and Minnesota Department of Health (MDH).

On March 18 - “In room” delivery of all meals began, rather than being served in the community restaurants.

On March 23 - The mandatory, expanded “I’m Okay” checks (COVID symptoms screen) began at the Edina, MN community, where the first COVID-19 positive case occurred.

Since March 24 - Residents have been “sheltering in place” (MN), “safer at home” (WI), and “stay at home” (PA), and the only people being allowed into the communities are staff members and “business and medically essential” personnel, whose temperatures are taken daily when they arrive for work.

On March 27 - The expanded “I’m Okay” checks became the standard practice across all 11 communities.

On April 3 - The Waters began requiring universal masking for all team members.

“This series of dates for intentional implementation of new precautionary measures, reflects the pace at which things were changing and we were quick to respond accordingly,” says Heidi Elliott, Vice President of Operations. “We followed the guidance for skilled nursing facilities in implementing necessary infection control measures. We were consistently proactive and made the appropriate changes long before we were required to, even though we were not mandated under the same timelines for implementation that skilled nursing facilities were under,” says Elliott.

Understanding the Number of Reported Cases

“The safety precautions taken, and protocols in place, have successfully prevented COVID-19 exposures at the majority of The Waters’ eleven communities, a fact that can easily get lost among ever-changing daily news. “We’re aware that some people monitor the MN Department of Health’s web site daily, to see the names of congregate settings with new reported cases. Once you’re on the list, you remain on the list, which can create a skewed perception of the reality,” says Elliott. “For example, originally, we had one COVID-19 case in our White Bear Lake community and we’re happy to report that, shortly thereafter, the resident re-tested negative. So, The Waters of White Bear Lake is “COVID-Free” today, yet, our community’s name still remains on the MDH list,” says Elliott. The number of cases actually changes daily, due to a number of factors. “We have residents who tested COVID-positive who have been to the hospital and have recovered and come back; others have been in isolation and have recovered in place; and some, especially those on Hospice care who are more vulnerable, have passed away, a reality in senior living,” says Elliott.

“Given what has occurred across the country and especially in congregate settings, we knew it was possible that, despite all of our infection control measures, an exposure might occur,” Elliott said. The Waters first exposure was in the Edina, MN community and there have been multiple exposures since. The MDH is in the process of determining how the exposures began. What is known, is the majority of the exposures have been in residents who have underlying conditions and/or on Hospice, whose immune systems are already quite vulnerable.

Where We Are Now – COVID Cases and Recovery

At this time, The Waters as a portfolio has six COVID-positive residents who are recovering either in a community or in the hospital. A couple of the MN communities have experienced recent resident deaths, some of which tested positive for COVID-19, and a few of which were undetected until after they had passed. As a total portfolio we have eight deceased residents who had tested positive, seven of whom were on Hospice care for pre-existing conditions. According to the MDH, it will be up to their individual physicians to determine the ultimate cause of death, so The Waters management is unable to provide a definitive number, as we do not have access to that information. *The good news is that there are now residents who have already recovered or are in the process of recovering, from COVID-19. “The ‘recovery story’ is something not enough people are talking about,” says Elliott.*

About the Dedicated COVID-19 Care Area – Third Floor – Specialty Care Center

In response to the exposures, staff at The Waters of Edina have set up a dedicated COVID-19 Care Area on the third floor in its specialty care center, which typically houses residents living with Dementia and Alzheimer’s. Residents diagnosed with COVID-19 will be cared for there by licensed nurses wearing PPE (personal protective equipment) 24 hours a day. Presently, there are three recovering residents in this area. In addition, “COVID-19-free” residents who were residing on the third floor Specialty Care area, have now been relocated to an individual apartment in another part of the community. According to Karen Swain, Executive Director at The Waters of Edina, “Our residents and their family members are very supportive and comforted by the news of the dedicated area and specially trained team members assigned to care for our residents there.” The response from The Waters team members has also been favorable. “The creation of the dedicated COVID-19 Care area offers reassurance to our team members, as well; it’s comforting to know that the possibility of exposure is contained, which helps to reduce their anxiety,” says Swain.

“The health and wellbeing of our residents and team members is our number one priority at The Waters. We have the strictest of guidelines and protocols in place as guided by the MDH and CDC to minimize community spread,” said Elliott. Additionally, according to Elliott, “The Waters is hopeful that the establishment of the COVID-19 Care area will protect the health and wellbeing of residents and team members and minimize the risk of exposure while promoting recovery.”

Questions and How to Stay Informed

As always, if you have any questions that you'd like to discuss, please feel welcome to contact your Community Executive Director.

You are always invited to visit THE WATERS SENIOR LIVING WEB SITE to stay informed at

<https://www.thewatersseniorliving.com/>