



July 1, 2024

Major General Paul Friedrichs, MD, FACS  
Deputy Assistant to the President  
Director, Office of Pandemic Preparedness and Response Policy  
Executive Office of the President  
Office of Pandemic Preparedness and Response Policy  
Washington, DC 20503

Dear Major General Friedrichs:

We are writing on behalf of our nation's older adults as we prepare for respiratory virus season 2024/2025. The three years of the COVID-19 public health emergency (PHE) and the ensuing aftermath have reshaped our society in a significant way. One benefit has been greater awareness of and attention to respiratory viruses. Recognizing that older adults are uniquely susceptible to and impacted by three of the most common respiratory viruses, influenza, COVID-19, and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), LeadingAge presents to the Administration a few key measures that will not only serve the greater public but will increase protection of vulnerable populations such as older adults.

**About LeadingAge:** We represent more than 5,400 nonprofit aging services providers and other mission-driven organizations that touch millions of lives every day. Alongside our members and 36 state partners in 41 states, we use applied research, advocacy, education, and community-building to make America a better place to grow old. Our membership encompasses the continuum of services for people as they age, including those with disabilities. We bring together the most inventive minds in the field to lead and innovate solutions that support older adults wherever they call home. For more information, visit [leadingage.org](https://leadingage.org).

**Access to COVID Test Kits.** During the COVID-19 public health emergency (PHE), the Administration provided for the Department of Health & Human Services (HHS) to send free COVID-19 test kits to every nursing home and assisted living in the nation on a weekly basis. By making these test kits readily available to these settings, the older adults and healthcare personnel living and working in these settings were able to be tested immediately upon showing respiratory virus symptoms. This allowed nursing homes and assisted living residences to take quick action to implement treatment and mitigation strategies, improving outcomes for ill individuals and better protecting the communities in which they lived and worked.

HHS further developed a program that allowed nursing homes and assisted living communities to request additional free test kits when their testing needs exceeded weekly allocations. HHS teamed with the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) on a similar program allowing affordable senior housing communities to request free COVID test kits to be made available for the older adults in their communities. As the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) continues to identify testing as an important strategy in the prevention of respiratory virus transmission, **LeadingAge asks that these programs continue throughout the 2024/2025 respiratory virus season and expand to include home and community-based services (HCBS) to ensure older adults and the individuals who serve them have access to test kits that will support them in following CDC recommendations.**

**Public Access to COVID-19 and Flu Test Kits.** During the COVID-19 PHE, the Administration provided for the general public to be able to request small quantities of free COVID test kits to be mailed directly to their homes in the community. This ensured that all had access to the testing needed to prevent transmission of COVID-19 without leaving their homes and regardless of income, insurance, access to healthcare, or access to transportation. **LeadingAge asks that the Administration resume the at-home COVID test kit program for the 2024/2025 respiratory virus season to ensure continued access for the American public to this key prevention strategy.**

Additionally, **LeadingAge asks that the Administration also make at-home flu test kits available to be requested by and mailed directly to individuals in their homes.** During the 2023/2024 respiratory virus season, CDC shifted strategies away from a targeted focus on COVID to a broader focus on respiratory viruses including flu to emphasize the importance of applying prevention and mitigation strategies to these viruses just as we have become accustomed with COVID. Being COVID-negative does not mean a sick individual should feel free to engage in their normal routines. As CDC recommends, any sick individual should stay home to prevent spread. In support of this strategy, it is important to ensure ample access to both flu and COVID at-home testing to encourage all individuals to take appropriate measures when sick. While flu testing may be available at clinics and over the counter, we feel it is important to remove all barriers to flu testing, including barriers of income, insurance, access to healthcare, and access to transportation, just as we have removed barriers to COVID testing.

**Access to Respiratory Virus Vaccines and Treatment.** Recognizing immunization and therapeutics as core prevention strategies for respiratory viruses, it is imperative that we ensure continued access to respiratory virus vaccines and treatment. During the COVID-19 PHE, the Administration provided for access to free COVID-19 vaccination for uninsured and underinsured adults through the Bridge Access Program. This program was invaluable for ensuring access to vaccines and while we are aware that funding for this program is ending, we encourage the Administration to support subsequent similar programs.

**LeadingAge asks that the Administration ensure continued access to respiratory virus vaccines for all individuals by maintaining requirements for coverage of vaccines and therapeutics by Medicare and private insurers and by supporting programs like the Bridge Access Program that provide free vaccination to uninsured and underinsured individuals. We additionally ask the Administration to continue working with long-term care pharmacies to prioritize supply and to address any identified barriers that threaten access to vaccine and treatment for older adults and the individuals who serve them.**

We thank you for your attention to these matters. As we continue to recover from the devastation of the COVID-19 PHE, we are determined to move forward in a way that optimizes the health and well-being of all individuals including older adults.

Sincerely,



Jodi Eyigor  
Director, Nursing Home Quality & Policy