

## United States Senate

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March 4, 2020

The Honorable Alex M. Azar II  
Secretary  
Department of Health and Human Services  
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dr. Robert R. Redfield  
Director  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
1600 Clifton Road  
Atlanta, GA 30329

Dear Secretary Azar and Director Redfield:

First, thank you for the leadership you and your team have taken thus far to respond to the growing threat of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. We are in a situation where more and more infections are being confirmed with each new day. As of March 4, the COVID-19 outbreak has infected more than 93,000 people and killed nearly 3,200 people globally. Despite the efforts of federal and state officials to contain the spread of the virus, we are now seeing reports of infections in more states with confirmed cases jumping to at least 100 nationally, including the death of 9 people, just over the last several days.

I am particularly concerned about the grave impact the spread of COVID-19 will have on seniors in nursing homes and other long-term care facilities in Arizona and across the nation. Of the nine deaths reported, 7 are from the same nursing home in Washington State. In the U.S., there are 2.2 million people living in long-term care facilities. In Arizona, these facilities care for more than 18,000 seniors at any given time. Residents of nursing homes have heightened risk due to their advanced age and underlying health conditions. Most of them are in group settings and reside in close proximity with each other, so airborne pathogens can spread rapidly. A recent report in the Journal of the American Medical Association stated that while the mortality rate is between 1 to 2 percent, the rate can be as high as 8 to 15 percent in older patients. At a recent briefing, the World Health Organization said the global mortality rate for COVID-19 is now 3.4 percent.

It is important that seniors, and their families, in my state and across the U.S. feel assured that our federal agencies are prepared, and state and local officials have the resources, to address the risk of COVID-19 in nursing homes and other long-term care facilities.

I appreciate your attention in answering the following questions:

- What specific efforts by HHS are currently in place to protect seniors in long-term care facilities, such as nursing homes and assisted living facilities, from the COVID-19 virus spreading?
- How are, or would, current residents be tested for possible COVID-19 infection when transportation to hospitals, laboratories, or other testing facilities are not feasible?
- Have appropriate protocol for these situations been communicated to these facilities?

- What types of coordination between federal and state agencies have embarked since the recent reports of nursing home deaths in Washington State?
- Does the HHS have the proper infrastructure in place to not only address the potential for community spread of COVID-19, but also ensure administrators and their staff have guidelines and other pertinent information to prevent the spread of the virus in these settings?

I understand the current situation is quickly developing, and our efforts require an all-hands-on-deck approach. Preparation is key. I look forward to your answers and working closely to address the threat of the further spread of COVID-19 virus on our communities – nursing homes and other long-term care facilities, in particular.

Sincerely,



Martha McSally  
U.S. Senator