Dear Members of the Hebrew SeniorLife Community—

Given the extensive media coverage and the recent Centers for Disease Control (CDC) announcement that a Coronavirus/Covid-19 pandemic is becoming more likely, we’re writing with five key points that will answer your questions about what HSL is doing to prepare, and how to protect yourselves and your families.

First, there is no reason to panic and it’s important for all of us to stay calm. Remember that in the U.S. there are only 60 confirmed Covid-19 cases. To compare, there have been 2.5 million cases of influenza in the U.S. so far this season. The CDC and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MADPH) remind you that the risk for Covid-19 infection in the U.S. and in Massachusetts remains low.

Second, at HSL we follow strict infection prevention and control protocols to minimize exposures to any airborne virus. We have an excellent Infection Control team that works closely with MADPH and follows their recommendations. We are actively monitoring CDC and MADPH recommendations and communicate often with MADPH. While there are still many unknowns about Covid-19, and the situation is rapidly evolving, what we DO know is that most affected people have recovered or are recovering.

Third, it’s important for all members of the HSL community including residents on all campuses, patients in all levels of care, and family members to understand and follow the recommendations of the HSL Infection Control team: If a patient has symptoms of a respiratory infection (cough, fever) that patient will be placed on droplet precautions and staff caring for them will wear protective equipment. This recommendation was true even before we knew about Covid-19 and is important for preventing the spread of much more common viruses such as the flu.

Right now, there is no known effective treatment or vaccine for Covid-19. So, it’s important to follow Infection Control’s additional recommendations, listed below, to ensure the health and safety of yourselves, your families, and all members of the HSL community:

1) Wash your hands frequently: use soap and water for 20 seconds, rub vigorously and be sure to pay attention to the area between your fingers. You can also use alcohol-based hand sanitizers, but you should also rub vigorously until your hands are dry. This should also take about 20 seconds.

2) If you need to cough, cough into a tissue or your elbow. Don’t forget to wash your hands after.

3) If you are sick with cold or flu symptoms, such as a cough or fever, stay home. Employees, if you are not sure whether you should stay home, talk with Occupational Health or your doctor.

4) Visitors with respiratory symptoms are advised to avoid visiting HSL communities.

Fourth, if you haven’t yet received the flu vaccine, and have no health issues that would prevent you from getting the vaccine, I STRONGLY encourage you to get vaccinated. While the seasonal flu vaccine will not prevent Covid-19, it is important to stay as healthy as possible if Covid-19 becomes more widespread here.

And finally, there is already an epidemic of fake news—social media and the internet are full of rumors about how Covid-19 is being spread or how it can be cured. Please review the Frequently Asked Questions on the back of this letter, and only refer to reputable sources for information, such as:


While it is important to be prepared, it is equally important to remain calm. I will be updating you frequently as more information becomes available.

Sincerely,
Helen Chen, Chief Medical Officer
Frequently asked questions: As the situation continues to change, we recommend that you check the cdc.gov website for the most up-to-date information: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html

Travel:

- **I recently traveled outside the U.S. Do I need to be concerned?** While there have been isolated cases of Covid-19 reported in many countries, the main risk appears to be for those who traveled to China or were exposed to others who traveled to China. Most of those travelers were screened on return to the U.S. However, if you have traveled to China or one of the countries with a travel advisory (see below) within the past two weeks and you develop respiratory symptoms, you should call your doctor to discuss what to do.

- **I have a trip planned later this year, should I cancel it?** Again, it depends where you are planning to travel. Many airlines have suspended flights to affected regions, so you should definitely check with your airline. In addition, the CDC has issued some travel advisories. China and South Korea are level 3: “avoid any nonessential travel.” Currently, Japan, Italy, and Iran are level 2: “practice enhanced precautions,” which means people with high-risk health conditions should avoid non-essential travel to these countries.

Prevention:

- **Should I avoid going out or participating in group activities?** As a reminder, the risk of Covid-19 in Mass. remains low. You should try to avoid contact with people who are ill (this is a good thing in general), but there is no current recommendation that you should stay home if you are feeling well. Of course, if you have a fever or cough, it is probably best if you stay home until you are feeling better.

- **Should I wear a mask when I go out?** While there have been many photos of people wearing masks, particularly in China, masks are most effective when worn by the person who is ill with a respiratory infection. If you are going to see your doctor, most health care organizations will ask you to wear a mask if you are coughing. Please do not hoard masks—there is already global concern about supplies of surgical masks as many of the manufacturers are in China.

- **Should I avoid eating Chinese food or going to Chinese restaurants?** There is no evidence that Chinese food or restaurants in the U.S. have been a source of Covid-19 infection.

- **Will echinacea, zinc, Airborne, or vitamin C help me avoid Covid-19 infection?** There is currently no evidence for any of these treatments. What is currently being tried are other available antiviral medications. No results have been reported yet.

Preparedness If a Pandemic Occurs:

- **Should I stock up on food and other essentials?** New England is at risk for storms and hurricanes and it’s always wise to be prepared for emergencies, especially if you need critical medications or care for vulnerable people or pets. Unlike a snowstorm, for a pandemic you might consider having enough medications, pet food, and non-perishable food on hand in case you are unable to leave home for several weeks.

- **Is there anything else I should do to prepare?** Consider how you might manage child or pet care if you were unable to leave home. If you need personal aide care, you might discuss with your care provider or family what you would do if your aide(s) became ill.

Testing:

- **I have a cough and fever. Should I be tested for Covid-19?** Tests are not commonly available. It would be best to call your doctor first; they will likely assess you for your potential risk first, and then seek the advice of the MADPH or an infectious diseases specialist. There has been only ONE confirmed case of Covid-19 in Mass. and that person did not need medical care. Remember that the current risk for Covid-19 in Mass. is low.