

Dear Family Members and Responsible Parties,

If you have read today's Winston-Salem Journal [article](#) regarding COVID-19 infections in long-term care facilities, you will notice that Arbor Acres is mentioned once again. The article is based on the latest data available from the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services. Richard Craver, the author of the article, requested a comment yesterday, and my response is attached. Unfortunately, the numbers reported by the state are grossly misleading, meaning the newspaper reports that draw from their data are as well.

As you will see, I attempted to set the record straight clearly and transparently. Kathy Gwyn, Vice President of Health Services, Hannah Yoon, our Administrator and Nicole Mangione, our COVID Testing Coordinator, poured over our testing results and reviewed our reporting processes. This team has done an exceptional job of exceeding our regulatory obligations for case reporting.

While I cannot speak for how other communities report, I can say that we are following the law. We could employ perfectly legal methods to artificially lower the number of positive test results simply by not proactively testing our staff, leaving them to determine the need for, and obtain, testing for themselves. If Arbor Acres does not conduct testing, we have nothing to report, and that would prevent us from standing out from the crowd. However, that would not reflect our value of caring for those we serve, nor would it embody the ethical behavior you and I expect from Arbor Acres.

Our approach to protecting residents is preemptive. We are not obligated by state regulation to routinely test vaccinated staff, except when they exhibit certain symptoms or a resident tests positive, in which case rounds of testing ensue to determine those affected. While this is a reasonable approach, in many ways it is like closing the barn door after the horse has escaped.

At Arbor Acres, we employ a more proactive approach, which is to encourage staff with even mild symptoms (that could be attributed to seasonal allergies, etc.) to be tested in-house. We have found this to be the most prudent approach, regardless of the cost of the tests and the resulting bad press. Knowing with certainty that we have a positive case is preferable to not knowing. It demonstrates our concern for those we serve, and for the health and wellbeing of our staff and their families. It is also important to point out that we make no distinction between our healthcare staff and our Independent Living staff regarding testing. As a result, our reported positive cases will be higher. I am perfectly fine with taking a hit in the media for this stand.

As has been our practice since early 2020, we remain committed to following the law and being transparent about COVID-19 cases in our community. I recognize that this is a double-edged sword, but we will continue to do the right thing for the right reasons. I would also remind you that when you want to know the current state of COVID-19 at Arbor Acres, please visit our website [www.arboracres.org](http://www.arboracres.org), select the "Learn More" button at the top of the page and select "Arbor Acres COVID-19 Dashboard Update".

I hope that this note and my response to the Winston-Salem Journal provide you with context to their reporting. More importantly, I hope that it demonstrates to you just how seriously we continue to seek to preserve the health and wellbeing of the individuals you entrust to our care.

Sincerely,

Andrew Applegate  
President/CEO

Richard,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a response to your questions. Since the beginning of the pandemic, Arbor Acres was one of the first organizations who committed to total transparency when reporting active cases. We have done that through our website where we provide real time updates on the number of resident and staff positive test results. You can find this data by clicking on the “learn more” link on the COVID response banner at the top of our website [www.arboracres.org](http://www.arboracres.org) . On the subsequent page, you will find a link to “Arbor Acres COVID-19 Dashboard Update”. For your convenience, I have provided a copy of the chart below:

### COVID-19 Dashboard

As of 9/20/2022	Staff		Residents	
	Independent Living	Healthcare Areas	Independent Living	Healthcare Areas
Positive Cases	0	5	0	26
Vaccination Rates	100.0%		99.97%	

I think you will recall that Arbor Acres was the first retirement community in the area to mandate COVID vaccination for staff. I am pleased that 100% of staff member are in full compliance with our vaccination policies. It is an unfortunate reality that the current strain of COVID-19 is highly transmissible even with the vaccinations and the use of not only masks and gloves, but also the use of face shields by all staff members entering our licensed areas.

Frankly, we are confounded by the numbers being reported by the state. In response to your email, I requested from my staff a list of all positive cases in our skilled nursing, assisted living, memory care assisted living and independent living homes and apartments which we have reported to the Department. **Since January 1 through September 20, 2022** Arbor Acres positive test results were as follows:

#### Residents

Skilled Nursing\*: 33 positive cases  
Assisted Living\*: 16 positive cases  
Memory Care AL\*: 0 positive cases  
Independent Living: 59 positive cases

#### Staff:

Skilled Nursing: 68 positive cases  
Assisted Living/Memory Care: 50 positive cases  
Independent Living: 36 positive cases

Considering that Arbor Acres serves daily nearly 475 residents through the dedicated service of nearly 400 staff members, and the coming and going of literally thousands of guests, volunteers and visitors in the last year, I am extremely pleased with the vigilance with which our COVID team has followed all the requisite procedures provided to us by the state. I am also proud that we continue to provide free in-house testing to our staff. This enables us to quickly respond to any positive test results vs. relying on staff going to local pharmacies or other agencies to conduct the tests. This, of course, results in Arbor Acres reporting additional positive test results which we would not otherwise know about. **We do this even though this results in increased reports of positive tests that would otherwise not be submitted.**

In response to your inquiry about how our approach to the pandemic has changed since 2021, I can share that we are operationally function nearly identical to how we did during the most difficult period of the pandemic in 2020 and 2021. The primary difference is that resident families and guests freely come and go as they wish. We, of course, conduct screenings and require all guest to be masked when in the building. Communal dining and activities have resumed without residents needing to mask. Resident who test positive are still quarantined in accordance with health department guidelines. This health department regulation has not changed since the start of the pandemic.

\*Due to our licensure category as a “combination facility” all three licensed areas are published on the NCDHHS website as “nursing home”. The total number of individuals who could possibly be served in these three areas is a potential of 185.)

I apologize this is coming to you so late in the day. I just want to ensure you have the most accurate information. I am happy to talk with you further if you have any questions. Please feel free to reach out.

Thank you.

Andrew Applegate