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Most Pa. nursing homes with 20 or more coronavirus deaths are in Philly and its suburbs, long-sought data show

by **Sean Collins Walsh**, **Vinny Vella** and **Rebecca Moss**, Updated: 38 minutes ago

CHARLES FOX / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

At least 32 residents of the Immaculate Mary nursing home in Northeast Philadelphia have died. For the Parkhouse facility in Royersford, the official death toll stands at 48. The Broomall Rehabilitation & Nursing Center has lost more than 40 of its residents. And at least 35 who lived in Spring City's Southeastern Veterans Center are gone.

CORONAVIRUS COVERAGE

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These long-term care facilities are among the hardest hit by the coronavirus in the Philadelphia area, according to long-sought data detailing the pandemic's impact on nursing homes. The state released the data Tuesday.

Across Pennsylvania, there are about four dozen facilities that have seen at least 20 residents die, the data show. Twenty-eight of those were in Philadelphia and its suburbs.

Many of the figures provided by the state, however, do not align with statistics provided by local officials and some of the operators of the senior facilities. For the most part, the tallies appear to be undercounts, possibly reflecting delays in data reporting.

Deaths in nursing homes and assisted-living facilities account for more than 68% of all coronavirus-related fatalities in the state, with 3,086 long-term care resident fatalities. Until Tuesday, the state had released totals only by county. This accounting showed the highest number of deaths occurring at homes in Philadelphia, Montgomery, Bucks, and Delaware Counties.

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After calls for greater transparency about nursing home outbreaks from relatives of residents, the state Department of Health on Tuesday released the new information, which shows the names of infected facilities, the county in which each is located, the number of cases among residents and staff members, and the number of deaths.

At first, state officials resisted releasing the data, saying it was too convoluted for public consumption, and later citing a decades-old disease privacy law. The department reversed course after a recent federal regulatory change, for which Sen. Bob Casey (D., Pa.) was a leading advocate, that mandates long-term care facilities report cases to federal officials as well as notify residents and families.

Without such disclosures, advocates said, some facilities could hide known cases of the virus from residents, families, staff, and the larger community, while obscuring which homes were most in need of resources. Several other states had made public the names of facilities and their case counts before new federal requirements, including New Jersey, Minnesota, and Kentucky.

"We are committed to continuing networks of support for these facilities so we can navigate and overcome this challenge together," Human Services Secretary Teresa Miller said in a statement.

Cases and Deaths in Southeastern Pa. Nursing Homes

The Pennsylvania Department of Health on Tuesday released data on coronavirus cases and deaths among the state's long-term-care facilities. The state's data have many limitations. Figures are self-reported by the facilities, and those with no cases or deaths were excluded. Some of the data for the facilities reflect current cases, not cumulative cases over the course of the pandemic, according to the state. Additionally, a facility with multiple levels of care (skilled nursing, assisted living, or personal care) appear multiple times in the data, without any clarification. Those facilities were excluded from this table.

Because of these limitations, this chart of facilities in Philadelphia and its suburban counties is **limited to nursing homes**, and excludes assisted-living facilities and personal-care homes. Since the state did not provide the number of licensed beds by facility, comparisons by rates are not possible. A nursing home with a high number of cases could reflect a facility's size more than the scale of any virus outbreak. Also, the state redacted figures for categories with fewer than five cases, which are marked by an asterisk.

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* Number between 1 and 4 redacted by the state

Table: DYLAN PURCELL / Staff • Source: Pa. Department of Health

Despite apparent undercounts of cases and deaths at many facilities, the data nonetheless demonstrate the breadth of the destruction the virus has wrought on senior centers.

The 198-bed Broomall facility, which the state showed had 40 deaths, had actually counted 46 of its residents who passed away due to the coronavirus as of Tuesday, a spokesperson said.

"We are working closely with the health authorities to follow their guidance, and will continue to be transparent with all information released to the authorities, family members and the wider public, while maintaining the dignity and privacy of each of our residents," Annaliese Impink, chief experience officer of the facility's parent company, SavaSeniorCare Consulting LLC, said in a statement.

The highest death toll in a single facility was at Brighton Rehabilitation and Wellness Center, outside of Pittsburgh in Beaver County. The facility has seen at least 76 out of its roughly 590 residents succumbing to the virus, the data show. The state has installed a temporary manager and sent in the National Guard for additional support. Lawmakers have called for a federal investigation.

"At Brighton, we have worked tirelessly since the onset of the virus to prevent its spread," Kate Rogers, a spokesperson for the facility, said in a statement.

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The data also finally provided a clearer picture into local long-term care facilities whose trouble with the virus has been highly publicized.

In Chester County, the state-run Southeastern Veterans' Center has seen 106 of its residents test positive, including 35 who have died from the virus, according to the state data. Additionally, 13 staff members at the facility have tested positive.

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Those statistics seem to indicate a slowing of the death rate at the facility, which tripled over the course of five days in April. Current employees and relatives whose family members died in the facility have complained of a lack of communication from the administrators at the facility. In response, state and local officials called for an investigation into the center, asking for more transparency.

Phoebe Wyncote, a long-term care facility operated in the Montgomery County borough of the same name, had 51 residents test positive for coronavirus, 14 of whom died, according to state data.

The facility's operator, Phoebe Ministries, quickly and suddenly relocated all 37 of its skilled-nursing residents to another facility it owns in Allentown on April 17 due to a staff shortage.

Brynn Buskirk, the vice president of marketing and external relations for Phoebe Ministries, disputed some of those numbers Tuesday: She said 39 residents and 22 staff members tested positive for the virus. The death count was accurate.

Buskirk also said that 20 skilled-nursing residents will be sent back to Phoebe Wyncote on Wednesday, all of them recovered from the virus. None of the staff who temporarily cared for the residents in the Allentown facility have tested positive for the coronavirus, she said.

"We are taking extra precautions to mitigate the spread of the virus, including a consistent dedicated staff team for COVID positive residents, personal protective equipment, and screening measures," Buskirk said.

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It was unclear Tuesday if the 14 deaths included any of the residents who had been relocated — Buskirk said she couldn't discuss individual cases. She said Phoebe Ministries will continue to provide weekly updates to the Wyncote facility's residents and their families.

As of late Tuesday, officials at the Parkhouse and Immaculate Mary nursing homes could not be reached for comment.

Staff writers Allison Steele, Dylan Purcell, and William Bender contributed to this article.

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