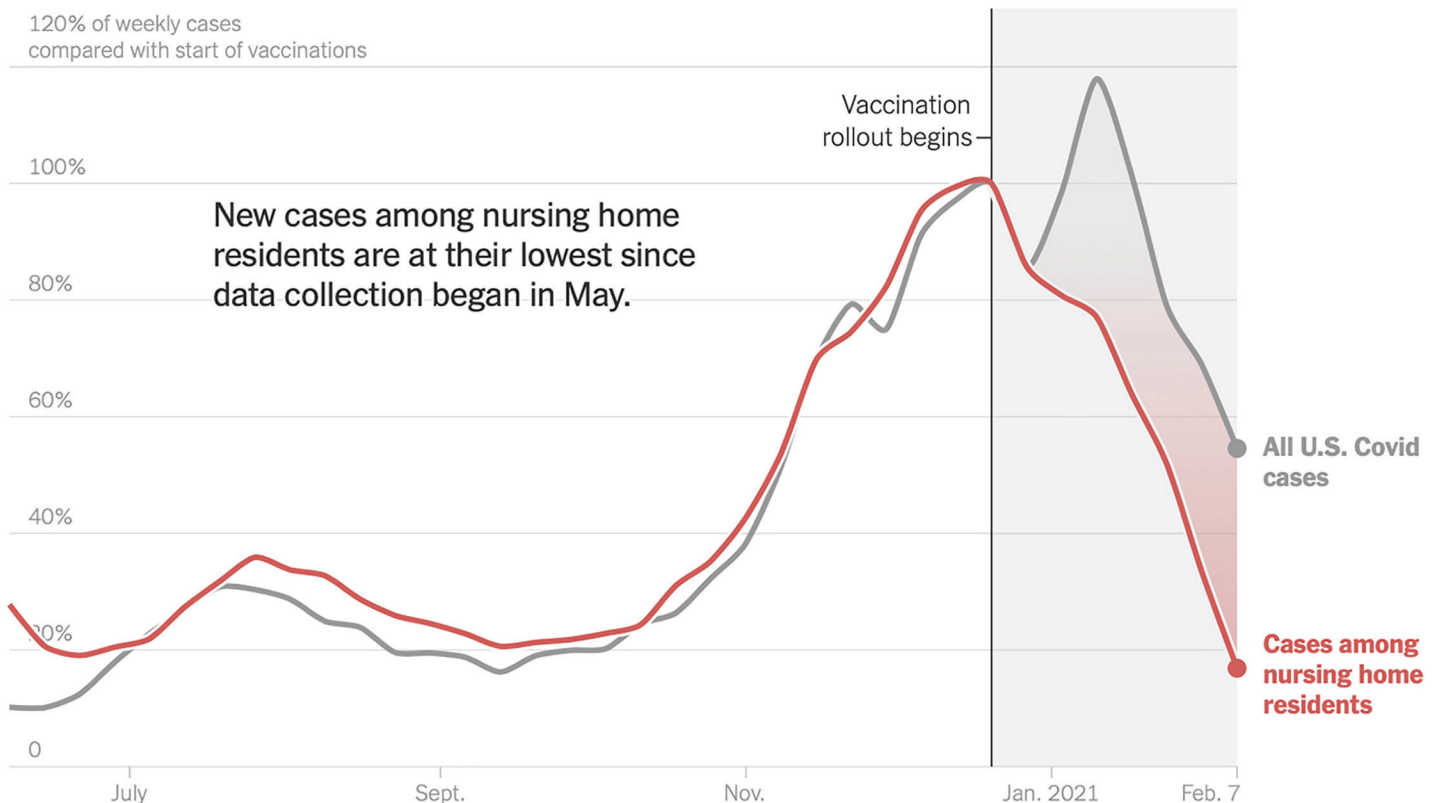


Vaccine Brings Huge Relief to Nursing Homes; Report Shows COVID-19 Shot is Protecting Vulnerable Residents

The widespread introduction of the COVID-19 vaccination in U.S. long-term care centers is rapidly pushing the deadly disease out of nursing homes, The [New York Times reported](#) in its Feb. 25, 2021 editions.

“From late December to early February, new cases among nursing home residents fell by more than 80 percent, nearly double the rate of improvement in the general population,” the Times article said. “The trendline for deaths was even more striking: Even as fatalities spiked overall [during] this winter, deaths inside the facilities have fallen, decreasing by more than 65 percent.”



Source: [New York Times database](#); U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Data shown is normalized compared with the weekly deaths for the week ending Dec. 20, 2020 and is through Feb. 7.

“Experts attribute the improvements in large part to the distribution of vaccines,” the Times added. “About 4.5 million residents and employees in long-term care facilities have received at least one dose of the vaccine, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), including about 2.1 million who have been fully vaccinated.”

Many studies, including a [Times report](#) from just the week before, have documented the virus’s devastating impact on long-term care facilities’ residents and employees. Although the 1.3 million cases in those centers account for just 5% of all U.S. cases, the 163,000 fatalities there make up more than one-third of all COVID-19 deaths in the country.

COVID-19 remains widespread and highly contagious across Texas. Despite extensive infection control efforts, the virus has found its way into even the most well-run nursing and assisted living facilities through community spread. Once it gets inside, residents' age, compromised health, and inability to fight off the virus – not the quality of care they receive – is responsible for the high death rate from COVID-19 related complications in many long-term care facilities.

“Nursing facilities have faced a myriad of ever-changing regulatory hurdles in responding to COVID-19. An effective vaccine was the weapon needed to continue to fight this disease,” said Kevin Warren, President of the Texas Health Care Association.

Meanwhile, fast-paced scientific discoveries regarding the novel coronavirus led to numerous and significant advances in diagnosis and treatment. Guidance for the care of a patient with COVID-19 changed weekly, if not daily, especially during the pandemic's early months. The CDC COVID-19 guidelines for nursing homes changed ten times since last March. Keeping up with state regulator's ever-changing guidance has been just as arduous and frustrating for facility leaders and staff.

“Here is the lesson that we have learned: We all, and I mean all of us, need to work together to quell a health crisis. Infection control practices work best if regulatory agencies, service providers, residents, family members, local leaders, and the public work together,” said Mark Lenhard, president of The Wesleyan, a faith-based, non-profit, senior living ministry in Georgetown.

Nursing home employees are underappreciated, said Warren.

“They put their health at risk every day in treating and protecting our most frail and elderly,” he said.