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Retired doctors can now quickly reactivate their N.J. licenses for free to fight the coronavirus

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Retired doctors and nurses can now quickly re-activate their licenses for free to help New Jersey fight the coronavirus, officials announced Friday.

Respiratory care therapists, midwives and others with licenses that were active within the last five years can apply online, according to an administrative order.

“The New Jersey healthcare professionals serving on the front lines in our fight against COVID-19 are nothing short of heroic,” state Attorney General Gurbir Grewal said in a statement. “But they need reinforcements.”

More than 11,000 doctors and tens of thousands of nurses could be eligible, according to Grewal’s office, and they should receive the green light within a day. The new licenses will last throughout the state’s public emergency.

The order also allows some foreign doctors to practice in New Jersey, lets medication prescriptions come from outside the state, and gives physician assistants and advanced practice nurses more leeway to work without a doctor’s supervision.

The changes are part of a broader effort to ease the strain on the state’s hospitals. About 4,000 out-of-state health care workers have received temporary licenses so far, according to Grewal’s office, and Gov. Phil Murphy said earlier in the week that about 5,200 health care workers had already answered a call for volunteers. Murphy signed an executive order Wednesday granting them protection from malpractice lawsuits.

In addition, certain nurses can now conduct some home checkups over the phone.

Normally, supervising nurses must visit certain elderly and disabled patients about once every 60 days for plan-of-care evaluations. That rule was waived to allow phone calls or video chats instead, the consumer affairs division announced Monday.

There are more than 1,000 private home-health businesses in the state, and each is required to staff at least one supervising nurse. The waiver does not apply to nurses providing daily home care.

The elderly are especially vulnerable to the virus, and more than a third of the state’s long-term care facilities have at least one positive case. Many health care workers have tested positive, and officials said family members had raised concerns that additional home visits put loved ones at risk.

“We are doing all we can to mitigate that risk while continuing to uphold the highest standards of care,” Paul Rodríguez, acting director of the consumer affairs division said in a statement.

New Jersey previously made it easier for out-of-state nurses to offer telehealth, and the division published a breakdown Friday of what’s allowed.