

November 15, 2021

Dear resident/resident representative,

We are excited to announce the newly released guidance to nursing homes from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS). Effective November 12, 2021 nursing homes will no longer need to halt visitation whenever a resident or staff case of COVID-19 is identified. This change is in part due to the levels of vaccination achieved nationally in both residents and staff of long-term care facilities (86% and 74% respectively). This level of vaccination proves the efficacy of vaccines; there has been an 80% reduction in COVID-19 cases reported in nursing homes between January 2021 and September 2021.

CMS specifies that each nursing home must review specific information with residents and families to enable effective decision making regarding visitation. This information includes:

- Visitors must still be screened at the front entry way for symptoms of COVID-19, recent exposure to anyone with COVID-19 or recent diagnosis of COVID-19 (generally considered to be within the last 10 days). Any visitor who does not pass his/her screening check will not be allowed to enter the building.
- Visitation is to take place in the resident's room. The only exception to this requirement is for residents in a semi-private room where the roommate's medical condition would render them more vulnerable to COVID-19 infection or if the roommate is unvaccinated. Visitors must use the shortest route possible to/from the resident's room.
- There will be no restrictions on the number of visitors in a resident's room. That said, visitors must still be able to physically distance from each other and from the resident.
- Core elements of infection control must be adhered to to decrease the risk for COVID-19 transmission. This includes:
  - Face covering or mask (covering nose and mouth) and physical distancing with at least six feet between people.
    - If the nursing home's county COVID-19 community level of transmission is rated substantial to high, all residents and visitors, regardless of vaccination status, should wear face coverings or masks and physically distance, particularly if either of them (resident or visitor) is at increased risk for severe disease or are unvaccinated.
    - If the resident and all of their visitor(s) are fully vaccinated and the resident is not moderately or severely immunocompromised, they may choose not to wear face coverings or masks and to have physical contact.
    - Unvaccinated residents may also choose to have physical touch based on their preferences and needs.
    - While not recommended, residents who are on transmission-based precautions (isolation for illness) or quarantine (exposure only) can still receive visitors. These visits should occur in the resident's room and the resident should wear a facemask if tolerated.
    - Visitors should wear face coverings or masks and physically distance when around other residents or healthcare personnel, regardless of vaccination status.
  - Outdoor visitation is preferred, unfortunately Minnesota's winters are not conducive to visiting outside.
  - Use of clear plexiglass dividers or curtains where practicable.

Despite vaccination it is still possible to contract the COVID-19 virus. If you are vaccinated and become infected with the virus, your risk of hospitalization and death drops dramatically. You are still able, however, able to spread the virus to others who may or may not be vaccinated. We encourage all visitors to be vaccinated as well as to routinely be tested for COVID-19, ideally 2-3 days before entering the facility to avoid inadvertently spreading the virus. You are considered contagious for 1-2 days prior to any COVID-19 symptoms (or positive test).

The health and safety of our residents and staff remain our primary concern. The infection control principles listed above are necessary to help us ensure their safety each and every day. If you feel that you are unable to comply with these requirements we encourage you to arrange for a virtual visit or to arrange a window visit with your loved one. CMS continues to stipulate the “visitors who are unable to adhere to the core principles of COVID-19 infection prevention should not be permitted to visit or should be asked to leave.”

The specific text of this guidance can be found by googling CMS QSO-20-39-NH.

Thank you,

Dean McDevitt

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