



## Health Department

### Guidance for Maintaining Safe Visitation Practices at Long-Term Care Facilities

According to CMS's Nursing Home Visitation – COVID-19 (QSO-20-39-NH, Revised 11/12/2021), "visitation is now allowed for all residents at all times." This updated guidance balances the resident's rights to make their own choices with the potential risk of in-person visitation. As such, facilities should continue to adhere to the Core Principles of COVID-19 Infection Prevention while offering visitation. All visitors should be made aware of the potential risks of visitation.

The CMS guidance does require some protections in higher-risk situations:

- When the county's COVID-19 **community level of transmission is substantial to high**, all residents and visitors, regardless of vaccination status, should wear face coverings or masks and physically distance, at all times.
  - Community transmission levels can be found on the [CDC website](#).
- When there is an **outbreak or outbreak testing** in a facility, all residents and visitors, regardless of vaccination status, should wear face coverings or masks and physically distance, at all times. Visitation should occur in the resident's room to limit exposures.
- When a resident's roommate is unvaccinated or immunocompromised, in-room visitation should be avoided, if possible, or adhere to the Core Principles if the resident cannot leave their room.
- CMS does not recommend residents on transmission-based precautions or quarantine receive visitors, although visitation should be allowed if desired by the resident. These residents receiving visitors should:
  - Wear a well-fitting facemask (if tolerated).
  - Be made aware of the additional risks and precautions necessary.
- Vaccinated residents desiring physical contact may do so, following the [CDC's guidance](#). If both parties are fully vaccinated, they may choose not to wear source control (ex. masks). Unvaccinated residents may also choose to have physical contact "based on their preference and need."

Additional suggestions for specific visitation options and situations are below. For suggestions on the safe implementation of visitation specific to your facility, please contact the Sedgwick County Health Department.

#### **Core Principles of COVID-19 Infection Prevention:**

- **Visitor screening** of all who enter the facility for visitation exclusions. Visitors who have positive viral test for COVID-19, symptoms of COVID-19, or currently meet the criteria for quarantine should not enter the facility.
- **Hand hygiene** (use of alcohol-based hand rub is preferred).
- **Face covering** or mask (covering mouth and nose) and **physical distancing** at least six feet between people, in accordance with [CDC guidance](#).
- **Instructional signage** throughout the facility and proper **visitor education** on COVID-19 signs and symptoms, infection control precautions, other applicable facility practices (e.g., use of face covering or mask, specified entries, exits and routes to designated areas, hand hygiene).
- **Cleaning and disinfecting** high-frequency touched surfaces in the facility **often**.
- **Cleaning and disinfecting** designated visitation areas **after each visit**.
- Appropriate staff use of **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)**.
- Effective **cohorting** of residents (e.g., separate areas dedicated to COVID-19 care).
- Resident and staff **testing** conducted as required at 42 CFR § 483.80(h) (see [QSO-20-38-NH](#)).

### **Guidance for Visitors:**

- Visitors should be aware of the risks of visitation. See page 3 for talking points and resources to explain the risk.
- Visitors should wear a mask while around staff or residents other than those they are visiting.
- Visitors who choose not to disclose their vaccination status should wear a mask at all times while in the facility.
- Visitors who have a positive viral test for COVID-19, symptoms of COVID-19, or currently meet the criteria for isolation or quarantine should not enter the facility.
- Encourage COVID-19 testing 2-3 days before visitation or, if feasible, offer testing to visitors.
- Encourage visitors to [get vaccinated](#), explaining the [risks](#) and [benefits](#) of vaccination.
  - A key benefit is that a vaccinated visitor is a much lower risk to their loved one than an unvaccinated visitor.
- Continue to offer alternative visitation options, such as phone calls, virtual visits, window visits, and outdoor visitation (as is feasible).

### **Guidance for Outdoor Visitation (as the weather and resident health allows):**

- While this option poses a lower risk of transmission and, per CMS, is preferable for unvaccinated residents or visitors, it may not be feasible due to the season or the resident's health.
- Ensure the environment is safe and accessible for both residents and visitors.
- Allow for physical distancing and hand hygiene.

### **Guidance for Indoor Visitation:**

- Per CMS, do NOT limit the number of visitors, frequency or duration of visits, or require advanced scheduling.
- Per CMS, continue to follow the Core Principles, particularly visitor screening, masking, and distancing requirements, for this more open visitation.
- Avoid putting other residents at greater risk by:
  - Offering a variety of visitation options (phone calls, virtual visits, window visits, outdoor visitation, and indoor visitation with both designated visitation areas and in-room visitation).
  - Requiring visitors to adhere to the Core Principles, particularly screening, masking, and distancing requirements.
  - Cleaning designated visitation areas that allow for physical distancing between groups between every visitation.
  - Utilizing barriers (Plexi-glass, etc.) during visitation where feasible, including in-room visitation.
  - Ensuring the Core Principles can still be observed during peak times. This will depend on the facility's resources and layout. If the designated visitation area is at capacity, consider in-room visitation to maintain physical distancing and avoid crowds.
  - Avoiding large gatherings that do not allow the Core Principles, especially physical distancing, to be observed.
  - Limiting visitor movement through the facility.
- Avoiding, where possible, in-room visitation if the resident's roommate is unvaccinated or immunocompromised. If the resident cannot leave their room, adhere to the Core Principles and implement these extra precautions:
  - All present should wear a face covering at all times; residents who cannot wear face coverings should be separated by a physical barrier.
  - Visitors should maintain physical distance from the roommate at all times.
  - Visitors should be separated from the roommate by a barrier, such as a curtain or Plexi-glass.
  - While the number and frequency of visitors cannot be restricted, the physical layout of the room may limit the number of visitors in the room at one time so that the visit may be safely conducted.

### **During an Outbreak or Outbreak Testing:**

- Follow the CMS guidance on COVID-19 testing to detect cases early.
- Emphasize adherence to the Core Principles for the safety of residents, visitors, and staff.

- Share the increased risk of visitation with the visitor and residents, including the possibility of exposure and quarantine.
  - Example wording may include, “There are people with COVID-19 in our facility right now. If you choose to visit, it is possible that you will be exposed. If you are identified as a close contact of a person with COVID, you would need to take steps to protect yourself and others. This could include quarantine if you are not presumed immune due to vaccination or past COVID-19.”
- Reducing the risk of visitation during an outbreak:
  - Per CMS, residents and visitors, regardless of vaccination status or test results, should wear a face covering at all times during an outbreak or outbreak testing.
  - Minimize potential exposures throughout the facility:
    - Offer alternative visitation options (phone calls, virtual visits, window visits, outdoor visitation) in addition to indoor, in-person visitation during the outbreak, which must be allowed if requested.
    - Use in-room visitation rather than designated visitation areas.
    - Use barriers (Plexi-glass, etc.) during in-room visitation where feasible.
    - Maintain physical distancing as much as possible.
    - Minimize staff contact with visitors as much as possible.

**Explaining the Risk to Residents and Visitors – Talking Points:**

- Not everyone in our facility is fully protected from COVID-19.
  - Some nursing home residents and staff are not fully vaccinated or have other health problems that make them more vulnerable to infection.
- Although a vaccinated person may not feel sick from COVID-19, they could still be infected and/or spread the virus to others. For example:
  - A vaccinated visitor with COVID-19 might feel well enough to visit the nursing home even if they are infectious. This could put the residents and staff at risk. This is why testing before visiting is important.
  - If a vaccinated resident contracts the virus from a staff member or visitor, that resident will likely be protected from severe disease, but could put an unvaccinated or immunocompromised resident or staff member at serious risk.
- Some settings are have more potential for spreading COVID-19 than others:
  - Any place where many people live, like our facility, naturally has a greater risk of spreading COVID-19.
  - People with other health conditions are at greater risk for more severe illness.
  - People who are older are often more vulnerable to infections.
  - A facility like ours combines all three of these factors, making it even more at risk for COVID-19.
- While we are still learning about immunity to COVID-19, we do know that immunity decreases over time.
  - Immunity from vaccination decreases as time goes on.
  - Immunity from past disease decreases as time goes on.
  - It is important to layer protection: vaccination, masks, physical distance, and hand hygiene.
- Vaccination is one tool to protect ourselves and our loved ones from COVID-19.
  - The protection provided by vaccination or past disease is not guaranteed and depends on many factors, including how much time has passed, how healthy a person is, how many exposures occur, how risky the exposures are, etc.
  - This is another reason it is important to layer protection: vaccination, masks, physical distance, and hand hygiene.

**Resources:**

For situation-specific assistance, contact

Sedgwick County Health Department Epidemiology Hotline:

316-660-5555 or [diseasereporting@sedgwick.gov](mailto:diseasereporting@sedgwick.gov)

Your COVID disease investigator is also available to assist you.

[KDADS Resident Visitation Preferences Template](#) (4<sup>th</sup> document in the top list):

This may be helpful in anticipating the visitation needs of residents.

[CDC Supporting Your Loved One in a Long-Term Care Facility:](#)

Explains options other than in-person visitation

[Interim Infection Prevention and Control Recommendations for Healthcare Personnel During the Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) Pandemic-updated 11-12-2021](#)