



State of New Jersey
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
PO BOX 360
TRENTON, N.J. 08625-0360

PHILIP D. MURPHY
Governor


www.nj.gov/health

SHEILA Y. OLIVER
Lt. Governor

JUDITH M. PERSICILLI, RN, BSN, MA
Commissioner

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TO: Administrators
Long-term Care Facilities Licensed Pursuant to N.J.A.C. 8:39
Assisted Living Residences Licensed Pursuant to N.J.A.C. 8:36
Comprehensive Personal Care Homes Licensed Pursuant to
N.J.A.C. 8:36
Residential Health Care Facilities Licensed Pursuant to N.J.A.C. 8:42
Dementia Care Homes Licensed Pursuant to N.J.A.C. 8:37

FROM: Marcela Maziarz, Deputy Commissioner 

SUBJECT: Holiday Visitation Guidance

THIS GUIDANCE REGARDING HOLIDAY VISITATION IS MEANT TO BE USED IN CONJUNCTION WITH GUIDANCE ISSUED BY THE CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION (CDC) AND COMMUNICABLE DISEASE SERVICE (CDS), AND CURRENT DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH (DOH) DIRECTIVES AND ORDERS.

As the spring holidays approach and more areas of New Jersey’s CALI scores return to high/very high, the DOH wanted to review the current visitation guidance per ED 20-026¹, revised January 6, 2021: https://www.nj.gov/health/legal/covid19/8-20_ExecutiveDirectiveNo20-026_LTCResumption_of_Svcs.pdf and as supplemented by Memo issued on March 22, 2021: https://www.state.nj.us/health/legal/covid19/3-22-21_Memo_StandardsProtocolsVisitorsFacilityStaff.pdf

On Monday, March 1, 2021 the CDC Director Rochelle Walensky warned against lifting coronavirus restrictions, pointing to the threat of variants and the "stalling" of recent declines in new cases. "Our recent declines appear to be stalling, stalling at over 70,000 cases a day," Walensky also said. "With these new statistics, I am really worried about reports that more states are rolling back the exact public health measures we have recommended to protect people from COVID-19."

On Wednesday March 10, 2021, the CDC and CMS issued the first set of guidelines on how fully vaccinated residents can visit safely. Refer to CMS QSO-20-39-NH at: <https://www.cms.gov/files/document/qso-20-39-nh-revised.pdf> and CDC Updated Healthcare Infection Prevention and Control Recommendations in Response to COVID-19 Vaccination are available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/infection-control-after-vaccination.html>.

The virus that causes Coronavirus 2019 Disease (COVID-19) is easily transmitted, especially in group settings. Many residents of healthcare facilities are being treated for health conditions that make them particularly vulnerable to suffering the most serious complications of COVID-19 infection, including death. As the upcoming holiday season will include family visitation, it is imperative for the residents of congregate living facilities that their families and facility staff take precautions in order to provide a safe environment for everyone.

Because of the risk of the rapid spread of the virus, and the need to protect all members of the community, especially residents of healthcare facilities who are at increased risk of serious complications and death from COVID-19, the DOH is providing the following guidance regarding visitation during the upcoming holiday season:

1. The April 13, 2020 Emergency Curtailment of Admission Order is still in effect. Facilities that cannot implement proper infection control protocols, cannot cohort, or do not have enough staff, PPE and cleaning supplies to properly care for all residents, may not admit or readmit residents into their facility. 4/13/2020 Order: https://nj.gov/health/legal/covid19/4-13-20_EmergencyCurtailmentOfAdmissions.pdf
2. The DOH strongly recommends against families taking residents out of facilities for holiday celebration events or gatherings in particular if those residents are not fully vaccinated¹. The CDC previously identified small family gatherings as being a primary driver for case surges after holidays such as Thanksgiving and Christmas. The CDC and the DOH recommend that individuals at increased risk of severe illness from COVID-19 avoid in-person gatherings with individuals with whom they do not live.
3. **Instead of family visits external to the facility, the DOH encourages outdoor visitation whenever possible.** Visits within the facility must meet the requirements for indoor visitation in accordance with ED 20-026 at: https://nj.gov/health/legal/covid19/8-20_ExecutiveDirectiveNo20-026_LTCResumption_of_Svcs.pdf and as supplemented by ED 21-001 at: https://www.state.nj.us/health/legal/covid19/3-22-21_Memo_StandardsProtocolsVisitorsFacilityStaff.pdf. Essential caregiver and compassionate care visits must be accommodated whenever possible, as required by the aforementioned directive. During an outbreak, facilities should use increased virtual communications in lieu of visitation over the holiday period.
4. Facilities should work with families, who decide to bring residents to gatherings outside of the facility, to complete the **COVID-19 Exposure Risk Assessment Template for Patients in Post-acute Care Settings** at: https://www.nj.gov/health/cd/documents/topics/NCOV/INFCONT_exp_risk_assess_template_patients_postacute.pdf. Outdoor gatherings are preferred even when the residents and families are fully vaccinated against COVID-19. Follow the CDC guidance for celebrating the holidays safely: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/holidays.html>. Facilities should remind residents and families to follow all recommended infection prevention and control measures when gathering during the holidays, including social distancing, hand hygiene and wearing a well-fitting cloth face covering or surgical face mask.

¹ Fully vaccinated refers to a person who is more than or at 2 weeks following receipt of the second dose in a 2 dose series, or more than or at 2 weeks following receipt of one dose of a single-dose vaccine, per the CDC's Public Health Recommendations for Vaccinated Persons: <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/info-by-product/clinical-considerations.html>.

5. In certain situations residents may have to quarantine if they leave the facility in accordance with CDC and DOH guidance as follows:
 - a. Require all residents, regardless of vaccination status, to quarantine following an exposure to someone with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 for 14-days upon return to the facility.
 - b. Require all unvaccinated or not fully vaccinated individuals who leave the facility for holiday gatherings/visits to quarantine for 14-days upon return to the facility after completing **COVID-19 Exposure Risk Assessment Template for Patients in Post-acute Care Settings**.
 - c. If the resident lives in a private residence or room, the resident may be quarantined in their private residence or room. These residents should still be separated from others in the facility for 14-days upon their return.
 - d. If the resident has a roommate, the resident should be quarantined in an observation room in the facility's new or re-admissions cohort, if one is available, for 14-days upon their return.
 - e. If an observation room is not available, the facility should notify the family that the resident will not be permitted to return to the facility until a room is available or until the facility is otherwise able to cohort returning residents in compliance with current CDC and DOH guidelines.
 - f. Facilities should develop and implement a plan in preparation for the return of residents leaving the facility for holiday visits/gatherings that includes the following:
 - i. Estimate how many residents can be cohorted, depending on the facility's available space, for a 14-day quarantine period based on current census and projected census, as well as available PPE and staff.
 - ii. Establish a sign-up process for residents and families to make reservations before taking a resident out of the facility. Reservations should be available up to the number of people the facility can accommodate for a 14-day quarantine period. Require the number of days requested for leave to be confirmed 36-hours before the resident leaves the facility.
 - iii. Create a waiting list for those residents who request a reservation after the established limit has been reached. Residents that leave without a reservation or on a waiting list may not be guaranteed readmittance to the facility at the end of their visit outside of the facility; please plan in advance for such situations. Residents/families should be informed of this possibility.
 - iv. Require 36-hours' notice of cancellation/change in plans before a resident is taken out of the facility for a family visit.

- v. Regardless of vaccination status, facilities should require the resident and family/friend to certify that:
 - 1. They are aware of the possible dangers of exposure to COVID-19 for both the resident and family/friend;
 - 2. They will follow masking, social distancing and hand hygiene practices pursuant to CDC and DOH directives; and
 - 3. They will notify the facility if anyone present at the holiday gatherings tests positive for COVID-19 or exhibits symptoms of COVID-19 within 14-days of the resident's visit/stay outside the facility.

- vi. The facility should obtain a signed consent from each family/friend and resident (if the resident is unable to consent, then consent needs to be signed by the authorized representative) with a copy provided to the family/friend and resident.

- g. Prior to taking a resident out of the facility, family members should contact the facility's administration to ensure the residents can be safely received and appropriately managed upon return to the facility. Facilities may require that families care for their loved ones until there is a room available to quarantine the resident. Families should work with the facility's administration to have a plan for quarantining the resident and for the resident's return.

- 6. Facilities should assess all residents using the CDS **COVID-19 Exposure Risk Assessment Template for Patients in Post-acute Care Settings** tool to help inform their planning for the leave of residents from their facility's during the holiday celebrations. The guidance can be found at: https://www.nj.gov/health/cd/documents/topics/NCOV/INFCONT_exp_risk_assess_template_patients_postacute.pdf

- 7. **Facilities should anticipate and must ensure adequate staffing to accommodate the increased demands related to holiday activities.**

- 8. Finally, ED 20-026 clearly allows for essential caregivers and compassionate care visits under certain conditions and we urge facilities to allow for these visits.

The New Jersey Department of Health would like to thank you for your hard work and dedication to your residents, families and staff and we wish you all a healthy and safe holiday!