



Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services

P.O. Box 570, Jefferson City, MO 65102-0570 Phone: 573-751-6400 FAX: 573-751-6010
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Randall W. Williams, MD, FACOG
Director



Michael L. Parson
Governor

TO: All Long-Term Care Facilities

FROM: Director Randall Williams, MD, FACOG

DATE: November 18, 2020

RE: **Guidance for Long-Term Care Facilities during the Holidays**

The Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS) is dedicated to protecting the health and safety of our citizens. This especially includes those Missourians that make their home in residential care facilities, assisted living facilities, intermediate care facilities, skilled nursing facilities, and intermediate care facilities for individuals with intellectual disabilities.

We recognize COVID-19 has had a profound impact on the lives of individuals living in long-term care facilities. The pandemic has directly impacted the health of those who have contracted the virus and affected residents indirectly through restrictions to visitation that have decreased valuable time spent with loved ones. In September, DHSS issued Guidance for Long Term Care Facilities to Establish Essential Caregiver Programs and to Allow Visits. This guidance provided a framework for facilities to use during the holidays.

Each year, many loved ones take residents who live in long-term care facilities to outside the facility to celebrate the holidays. Unfortunately, this year the fall and winter holiday seasons are coinciding with significant increases in community spread of COVID-19. The director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has recently reported that an important driver of the recent case increases is small family gatherings. The CDC and the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services recommend that individuals at increased risk of severe illness from COVID-19 avoid in-person gatherings with individuals with whom they do not live. We also recommend that facilities find innovative ways of recognizing the holidays without having parties or gatherings that could increase the risk of COVID-19 transmission (e.g., virtual parties).

Because most individuals living in long-term care facilities fall into the category of increased risk, DHSS strongly recommends against loved ones taking persons who reside in long-term care facilities outside the facility for holiday events. This recommendation does not apply to residents who in the last 90 days have been diagnosed with and recovered from COVID-19. Such individuals, however, must meet CDC criteria for discontinuing transmission-based precautions. Instead of visitations in outside the facility home, we recommend visiting with loved ones at the long-term care facility either through outdoor visitation or in those facilities where it is deemed safe through indoor visitation.

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For those residents and loved ones who will make the decision to gather outside the facility over the holidays, we recommend facilities ask loved ones to take the following steps to lower the risk of COVID-19 transmission.

- Limit close contact, the number of attendees, and perform social distancing. Gatherings with more people pose more risk than gatherings with fewer people. CDC does not have a limit or recommend a specific number of attendees for gatherings. The size of a holiday gathering should be determined based on the ability of attendees from different households to stay 6 feet (2 arm lengths) apart, wear masks, wash hands, and follow state and local health and safety laws, rules, and regulations;
- Wear facemasks or cloth face covering. When visiting with a resident, wear a facemask or cloth face covering. In addition, wear a facemask or cloth face covering while in the car with them.
- Limit contact with commonly touched surfaces or shared items;
- Perform hand hygiene often (e.g., wash hands with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer);
- Avoid large gatherings, crowded areas, and high-risk activities such as singing;
- For those attending a gathering, avoid contact with individuals outside of their household for 14 days prior to the gathering;
- Keep safe around food and drinks. Avoid potluck or buffet style food service and instead opt for individually prepared plates;
- If possible, conduct gatherings outdoors. Indoor gatherings should have good ventilation, open windows and doors if possible;
- Verbally greet others instead of shaking hands or giving hugs;
- Physically distance: Follow CDC guidelines and socially distance at least 6 feet from others when possible;
- Socially distance: Set up the gathering place so you can physically distance with individuals who have high-risk health conditions during meals or other times when a mask cannot be worn. If at all possible, have a separate bedroom and bathroom specifically for the resident;
- Screen those attending the gathering for symptoms (e.g., fever, body aches, fatigue, runny nose, cough) of COVID-19 or if they have had a recent exposure to someone with COVID-19. Anyone with symptoms should be isolated and anyone with exposures should be quarantined. If possible, test those in the household for COVID-19 in time to receive the results before having high-risk individuals at the gathering;
- Remind anyone who has signs or symptoms of COVID-19, or has been exposed to someone diagnosed with COVID-19, to not attend the gathering; and
- Read the [CDC Guidelines](#) for individuals to consider during the holidays.

Additionally, while the above actions can greatly reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19, due to the highly contagious nature of the virus, we recommend long-term care facilities take the following actions when residents return:

- Screen for signs and symptoms.
- Test a resident if signs or symptoms are present, or if a resident or their loved ones reports possible exposure to COVID-19 while outside the facility. A facility may also opt to test residents without signs or symptoms if they leave the facility frequently or for a prolonged length of time, such as over 24 hours.
- Ask residents and loved ones to report if they have had any exposure to COVID-19, while outside the facility. If the resident or their loved ones reports possible exposure to COVID-19 while outside of the facility, or if the resident has signs or symptoms of COVID-19 upon return, facilities should place the resident on transmission-based precautions (TBP). Also, facilities may want to consider placing residents on TBP if they were away from the facility for more than 24 hours.

As we progress through these challenging times, we express our sincere gratitude for everyone doing what they can to help protect long-term care facility residents. Our mission is to safeguard the health, safety, and quality of life for Missouri's long-term care facility residents while also honoring a resident's right to interact with loved ones.

While this year's holiday celebrations will be undoubtedly different than previous years, together, we can still find safe ways residents can enjoy the holidays with family and friends.

The DHSS encourages facilities to view the information at the following link for the most up-to-date information: <https://health.mo.gov/living/healthcondiseases/communicable/novel-coronavirus/>