

Nursing Home Visitation Guidance Points



On November 12, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) updated their [Nursing Home Visitation Guidance](#). Because of the high rates of vaccination among residents and the new vaccine requirement for staff, as well as the reduced number of new COVID-19 cases each week, **visitation is now allowed at all times for all residents**, this includes indoor visitation. All visitors must continue to adhere to infection prevention practices.

Main takeaways from the guidance:

- Facilities must allow indoor visitation at all times for all residents.
- Facilities can no longer limit frequency and length of visits, number of visitors, or require advanced scheduling of visits.
- Visits should be conducted in a way that adheres to the [core principles of COVID-19 infection prevention](#) and does not increase risks to other residents.
- Vaccinated and unvaccinated residents can have close contact, including touch. Visitors should be made aware of the risks of physical contact with unvaccinated residents before the visit.
- Communal activities and dining can occur while adhering to core principals of COVID-19 infection prevention. The safest approach is for everyone, regardless of vaccination status to wear a mask while in communal areas.
- While CMS strongly encourages vaccinations, visitors, ombudsman, protection and advocacy representatives, and surveyors are not required to be vaccinated.
- Visitors should be screened upon entry. Any visitor who is positive for COVID-19, or has symptoms of COVID-19, or meets the [criteria for quarantine](#) should not enter facilities.

Additional guidance provisions:

Masking

- Residents and visitors who are fully vaccinated and not immunocompromised, can decide if they want to wear masks and have physical contact. The guidance strongly encourages all residents and visitors to mask and distance when COVID-19 community transmission rates are substantial to high and also notes that it's safest to mask and distance, even when community transmission is low, particularly if the resident or visitor is not vaccinated.
- Visitors should wear masks around other residents and healthcare personnel regardless of their vaccination status.

Where Visitation Occurs

- Visitation can occur in the resident's room or a designated visitation area. Visitors should not wander around facilities.
- If a resident has a roommate who is unvaccinated or who is immunocompromised, then, if possible, visitation should take place outside the resident's room. However, if the resident cannot leave their room for health reasons, the facility should try to allow in room visitation while adhering to COVID-19 infection prevention core principles.

Quarantine and Transmission Based Precautions

- Residents who are on transmission-based precautions or quarantine can have visitors. These visits should occur in the resident's room and the resident should wear a mask. While these visits are allowed, the guidance notes that they are not recommended.
- Visitors should be made aware of the risks of visiting in these situations, and the precautions necessary before they visit.

Visitation During an Outbreak

- Visitors must still be allowed inside facilities, even during a COVID-19 outbreak investigation.
- During an outbreak, residents should wear masks, regardless of vaccination status and visits should, ideally, occur in the resident's room.

Testing and Vaccination

- Facilities are encouraged to offer testing to visitors and, if they do not offer testing, they should encourage visitors to be tested on their own.
- CMS strongly encourages all visitors to be vaccinated.
- While facilities may ask visitors about their vaccination status, visitors are not required to be tested or vaccinated to enter a facility. If a visitor does not disclose their vaccination status, they should wear masks at all times.
- Long-term care Ombudsman, Protection and Advocacy (P&A) system representatives, and surveyors are not required to be vaccinated to enter facilities.

Access to Long-Term Care Ombudsman and Protection and Advocacy (P&A) Programs

- Nursing homes must provide Long-Term Care Ombudsmen and representatives of P&A systems with immediate access to any resident.
- If a resident is on transmission-based precaution or quarantine, or unvaccinated in a county with a high level of community transmission, the resident and ombudsman or P&A representative should be made aware of the risk of visiting and the visit should take place in the resident's room.
- Facilities must allow alternative communication with the Ombudsman program if the resident does not want an in-person meeting.
- Facilities must comply with federal disability rights laws.

Entry of Healthcare Workers and Other Providers of Services

- All healthcare workers must be allowed to come into the facility as long as they're not subject to a work exclusion or showing signs or symptoms of COVID-19.
- Personnel educating and assisting in resident transitions to the community should be allowed entry.
- EMS personnel do not need to be screened.

Resident Outings

- Residents are permitted to leave the facility when they choose. They should be reminded to follow all infection prevention practices when they leave the facility.
- When residents return, they should be screened for signs or symptoms of COVID-19.
- If the resident or a family member reports a possible close contact to an individual with COVID-19, the resident should be tested regardless of vaccination status and placed on quarantine if the resident is not fully vaccinated.
- If the resident develops signs or symptoms of COVID-19 after returning to the facility, they should be tested and placed on Transmission Based Precautions, regardless of vaccination status.
- Facilities may test unvaccinated residents without signs or symptoms of COVID-19 if they leave the facility frequently or for prolonged time (over 24 hours).
- Facilities may consider quarantining unvaccinated residents who leave the facility, if it's unclear if they, or the people around them followed infection prevention practices.
- Residents should be monitored daily upon their return.
- Residents who leave for 24 hours or longer should be treated as new or readmissions as [recommended by the CDC](#).



If your facility is denying visitation:

1. Contact your Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program. The Long-Term Care Ombudsman program advocates for residents of nursing homes, assisted living facilities, board and care homes, and similar adult care homes. [Find contact information for a program near you](#).
2. File a complaint with your state survey agency. Residents and families have the right to complain and file a complaint with their state survey and certification agency when the resident's rights are not being met. You can find their information our [website](#).
3. Contact your state legislators and local representatives. Decision-makers need to hear from you! Call or email your local officials and share what you are experiencing.



National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care

www.theconsumervoice.org

info@theconsumervoice.org