

Indoor visitation: What does this mean, and how can families help make this successful?

October 1, 2020

We are eager to help reunite residents and their loved ones, and with your involvement, we can do this safely and smoothly.

Today during a press conference, Governor Larry Hogan announced that, effective immediately, indoor visitation in nursing homes may resume, and that facilities should follow the federal Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) guidance. Please note that the Maryland Department of Health has noted that assisted living facilities should follow this same guidance. Below, we will share some of the key facts that family members and loved ones of residents who are in nursing homes and assisted livings should know about what the CMS guidance allows, what it does not, the restrictions that are in place, and how each of you can help to make this successful.

What does “indoor visitation” during COVID-19 look like?

[CMS guidance](#) released on September 17 lays out restrictions that nursing homes must follow as they begin allowing visitors indoors.

- **Not every nursing home can start having indoor visitors.** To start having indoor visitors, the nursing home must have had NO new onset COVID-19 cases in the last 14 days and not be currently conducting outbreak testing. Also, the county positivity rates must be in the “low” or “medium” categories. Nursing homes in counties with high positivity rates cannot conduct indoor visitation, except in compassionate care situations.
- **Visitors MUST comply with and adhere to the core principles of infection control.** CMS has stated, and reiterated, the incredible importance of this. Nursing home staff are required to monitor if visitors are following these principles and will ask visitors to leave if they are having difficulty adhering.
- **Nursing homes must limit the number of visitors per resident, as well as the number of visitors in the building at any given time.** This means nursing homes might schedule visits at certain times and days and limit the length of time a family member or loved one can visit.
- **Nursing homes must limit the movement of visitors in the facility.** A visitor cannot walk around the building in areas where they will not be visiting a resident. Nursing homes will direct visitors on the appropriate route to visit with their loved one, and visitors must follow all of these directions, signage, etc.
- **Visits will be in specific, designated areas.** It is important to know that if your loved one is in a semi-private room with a roommate, nursing homes are not allowed to have visitors in the resident’s room.

What restrictions will visitors need to follow to visit safely?

The procedures may vary slightly between facilities, but the core restrictions and guidelines you will need to follow during a visit include:

- **Completing a screening before entering the building.** All visitors will be screened before entering the nursing home or assisted living. You will have your temperature taken and will be required to answer questions about symptoms, travel, and other potential exposures you may have had to COVID-19 in the last 14 days.
- **Hand washing.** Visitors should practice hand hygiene before visiting. You may be asked to use alcohol-based hand rub or wash your hands with soap and water prior to being permitted entry to the nursing home.
- **Wearing of personal protective equipment (PPE) during entire visit.** Mask wearing remains one of the best tools we have to stop the spread of COVID-19. Masks protect others from **you**, as well as you from **others**. Visitors will be required to wear masks and may also be required to wear other PPE.
- **Social distancing during the entire visit.** We recognize the challenge of not being able to physically touch our loved ones. However, it is imperative that visitors follow strict social distancing restrictions and remain safely more than 6 feet from their loved one, at all times.

What can family members and loved ones do to make this process run smoothly?

The number one thing families and loved ones can do is to be patient and ask how you can help. Nursing homes and assisted livings are working to keep entire communities of vulnerable older adults and to navigate continually changing guidance. Your support, understanding, and partnership in this process will help these changes be implemented more smoothly for all involved. Additionally, you can:

- Ask the nursing home or assisted living facility what their process will be for conducting indoor visitation.
- Follow the process the facility lays out for scheduling visits.
- Follow all protocols and procedures as required by the facility.
- Share this information with other family members and friends who have a loved one in a nursing home or assisted living.

Thank you for your partnership, and we so look forward to a time when we can all be together again.