



Holiday Guidance for Long-term Care Facilities

This guidance regarding holiday visitation is meant to be used in conjunction with [guidance](#) issued by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) as well as other [visitation guidance](#) developed by the Department of Health and Welfare to support Idaho long-term care facilities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The virus that causes COVID-19 is easily transmitted, especially in group settings. Many residents of long-term care facilities have health conditions that make them particularly vulnerable to suffering the most serious complications of COVID-19 infection, including death. The state of Idaho is currently experiencing a rise in COVID-19 cases and community spread. As the upcoming holiday season may include increased visitation at facilities, family gatherings, and other holiday events, it is imperative for the residents of long-term care facilities that their families and facility staff take precautions 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 long-term care facilities who are at increased risk of serious complications and death from COVID-19, the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare (IDHW) is providing the following guidance regarding visitation and family gatherings during the upcoming holiday season. This guidance aligns with guidance issued by the CDC and by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS):

1. Taking residents out of facilities for holiday celebration events or family gatherings is strongly discouraged. The CDC has reported that a significant driver of the recent case increases is small family gatherings. The CDC and IDHW recommend that individuals at increased risk of severe illness from COVID-19 avoid in person gatherings with individuals with whom they do not live.
2. Instead of family visits outside of the facility, IDHW recommends visitation outdoors (weather permitting), or possibly indoors in facilities that meet the requirements for indoor visitation in accordance with the [revised visitation guidelines](#) issued in October 2020. Increased virtual communications in lieu of visitation should also be used by facilities during the holidays.
3. Facilities should encourage families that decide to bring residents to gatherings outside of the facility to follow [CDC guidance](#) for celebrating the holidays. Facilities should remind residents and their families to follow all recommended infection prevention and control measures when gathering during the holidays, including social distancing, hand hygiene and wearing a cloth face covering or facemask.
4. Should a resident ultimately choose to leave the facility, IDHW provides the following recommendations:
 - Limit close contact (maintain physical distancing of six feet or more), keep gatherings as small as possible, and use technology to engage with others remotely;
 - Wear facemasks or cloth face covering at all times, except while eating (including in cars, homes, etc.);
 - Limit contact with commonly touched surfaces or shared items;
 - Keep safe around food and drinks. Avoid communal serving utensils, passing of food, potluck or buffet style food service, and instead opt for individually prepared plates by a single server;
 - Perform hand hygiene often (e.g., wash hands with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer);

- Avoid large gatherings (more than 10 people), crowded areas, and high-risk activities such as singing;
- Residents' friends and families who are attending a gathering with the resident should avoid contact with individuals outside of their household for 14 days prior to the gathering;
- Anyone who has signs or symptoms of COVID-19, or has been exposed to someone diagnosed with COVID-19, should not attend the gathering;
- If possible, conduct gatherings outdoors. Indoor gatherings should have good ventilation, including open windows and doors if possible;
- Verbally greet others instead of shaking hands or giving hugs. Think ahead about how you will manage to prevent physical interactions with loved ones of different ages such as young children; and
- Check local conditions and state requirements for precautions and restrictions, including positivity rates and quarantine requirements, before crossing state lines.

Staff in long-term care facilities should also use extra caution, especially during the holidays. Staff should follow the same recommendations for residents and families regarding gathering with their families and friends outside of work to protect the vulnerable residents they care for.

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

- Screen the resident upon return and subsequently increase monitoring for signs and symptoms.
- Test a resident for COVID-19 if signs or symptoms are present or if a resident or their family 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, or other situations in which the facility determines testing is necessary to protect other residents in the facility. Exceptions may be made for asymptomatic residents who have been diagnosed with and recovered from COVID-19 within the previous 90 days. See [CDC guidance](#) for more information.
- Place the resident on [transmission-based precautions \(TBP\)](#) if the resident or family member reports possible exposure to COVID-19 while outside of the facility, or if the resident has signs or symptoms of COVID-19 upon return. Please inquire whether residents and loved ones have had any exposure to COVID-19 while outside of the facility.
- Consider placing residents on TBP if they were away from the facility for more than 24 hours or at the facility's discretion as necessary to protect staff and other residents.
- Consider other actions (such as cancelling communal dining and group activities) as necessary to protect the health and safety of all residents and staff.
- Ensure there is sufficient staff in the facility to meet the need for families and friends to gain access to the residents via telecommunication during the holidays.