



NAVIGATING HOLIDAY VISITS DURING COVID-19

The COVID-19 public health emergency (PHE) has been one of the greatest challenges you, as providers and as consumers and their families, have faced over the past nine months. We recognize and appreciate the heavy physical and emotional burden each of you personally continue to battle.

We have also seen the emotional impact that separation from loved ones has had on all of you. As the holidays quickly approach and families make plans to come together, we ask you to continue to consider the risks to those we care for and about and the steps we all should take to reduce the risk of contracting or spreading COVID-19, and encourage you to stay connected with each other through alternative means of communication whenever possible.

We also ask each of you to use extra caution during the holidays by following the same recommendations for gathering with families and friends set forth by your local health department or county.

Earlier this week in a press release, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) urged nursing home staff, residents and visitors to follow established guidelines for visitation and adherence to the core principles of infection control, including:

- Remaining six feet from others
- Wearing a face covering
- Limiting the number of visitors at any one time

While these guidelines are directed at nursing homes, they are wise examples all of us can put into practice as we celebrate. With the holiday season approaching, everyone wants to spend more time with their loved ones. We recommend finding innovative ways of recognizing the holidays without having parties or gatherings that could increase the risk of COVID-19 transmission (e.g., virtual parties or visits, etc.).

We know some residents may want to leave a congregate setting temporarily to visit family and friends for the holidays. While we support family engagement and every person's right to visit family and friends, everyone needs to work together to take extra precautions to help reduce the spread of COVID-19. In fact, CMS **recommends against residents leaving a nursing facility** during this PHE. With the potential for a safe and effective vaccine on the immediate horizon, extra precautions now in any setting are essential to protect until a vaccine becomes available.

We would like to share more recommendation from CMS that we can all consider:

- 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;
- Always wear facemasks or cloth face covering (including in cars, homes, restaurants, 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, 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;
- Ask anyone who has signs or symptoms of COVID-19, or has been exposed to someone diagnosed with COVID-19, to not attend the gathering;
- 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. 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.

CMS has collaborated with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on these recommendations, and we encourage you to review CDC's [webpage on holiday celebrations](#), which has more suggestions for preventing the spread of COVID-19.

Again, we want to express our sincere appreciation for everything you do to take care of those of us who are less fortunate and face greater health risks during this pandemic. Even though this year's holiday celebrations will be undeniably different than years past, together we can still find safe ways to ensure an enjoyable holiday season with family and friends.

Wishing you all a happy and health holiday season,



Laura Howard
Secretary, Kansas Department for Aging and Disability Services