

# Guidance Considerations for the Holiday Season

*Note: These recommendations are based on current recommendations and will be updated as formal guidance is released.*

In prior years, families with loved ones in long-term care facilities would celebrate the holiday season together.

Unfortunately, in 2020, 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 Pennsylvania Department of Health recommend that individuals at increased risk of severe illness from COVID-19 should avoid in-person gatherings with individuals with whom they do not live.

Because most individuals living in long-term care facilities fall into the category of 'increased risk,' the Department of Health strongly recommends **against** families taking persons who reside in long-term care facilities to their homes or to gatherings for holiday events.

So, what does that mean for long-term care providers and staff this holiday season?

## PROACTIVELY COMMUNICATE WITH FAMILIES

Providers should communicate with resident families and educate them on the risks of taking their loved one out of the facility. Encourage them to consider alternative methods for connecting with them and offer options that can be safely provided by your facility, such as outdoor visitations or indoor visits where it is deemed safe.

It is recommended that you ensure that the families understand the following as it relates to your facility situation and policies:

- **Visitation status** - Share information on what your facility is allowing in regards to visitation (indoor and/or outdoor) and the protocols that must be adhered to. Ensure they are aware of any restrictions due to physical limitations of the facility, weather conditions, and outbreak status in a facility or the surrounding community.
- **Outbreak status** - Share the status of the facility regarding COVID-19 cases (outbreak or currently testing individuals on suspicion of an outbreak) and what the protocols are regarding visitation and taking their loved one out of the center in these situations. Ensure they understand the risks of exposing themselves and their family and that exposures might affect their ability to visit with friends and family moving forward.

If families insist on taking their loved one out of the facility, ensure they understand the facility's policies that will be followed upon the resident's return.

**In addition, we encourage you to consider sharing these additional recommendations with families who choose to take their loved ones out of the facility to help lower the risk of COVID-19 transmission:**

## PLAN AHEAD

Take proactive steps to reduce the risk that anyone in your house, or visiting your house, develops or is exposed to COVID-19:

- **Decrease exposures** - For two weeks prior to your holiday gatherings, avoid indoor settings with people you don't live with where you cannot socially distance or wear a mask (e.g., indoor social events, bars, restaurants, carpooling).
- **Wear a mask** - Wear a cloth mask at all times when you are in indoor locations outside of your house or at outdoor events where you cannot socially distance from others.

- **Wash your hands** -As recommended by the CDC, regularly wash your hands or use hand sanitizer and ask those coming in your house to do the same.
- **Physically distance** - Follow CDC guidelines and socially distance at least 6 feet from others outside your household when possible.

## CREATE A SAFE ENVIRONMENT

Create a safer environment for those visiting you.

- **Screen** - Ask anyone entering or staying in your house if they have had 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 in your house with symptoms should be isolated and anyone with exposures should be quarantined. If possible, get tested for COVID-19 in time to receive the results before having high-risk individuals in your home.
- **Mask** - When at-risk individuals are visiting, you should wear a mask while visiting with them inside your house. In addition, you should wear a cloth face covering while in the car with them. If individuals staying with you can also wear a mask, ask them to do so as well.
- **Socially distance** - Set up your house so you can physically distance with individuals who have high-risk health conditions while they are visiting you and during meals or other times when a mask cannot be worn.
- **Wash your hands** - Make sure plenty of hand sanitizer is available and ask all those in your house to use it or to wash their hands regularly as recommended by the CDC.
- **Clean surfaces** -Designate someone to regularly clean high touch surfaces in your house (e.g., tables, doorknobs, light switches, countertops, handles, desks, phones, keyboards, toilets, faucets, sinks, etc.). Make sure you have an approved COVID-19 cleaning solution available and know the appropriate cleaning procedures. Also plan for the safe storage of cleaning solutions to prevent children or those with cognitive deficits from getting into them.
- **Air flow** - Make environmental changes to decrease the indoor spread of COVID-19. This includes cracking windows, use of room HEPA filters, humidifiers and opening blinds.

## Questions?

**Please reach out to our team. We're here to help!**

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