

Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Guidance for Long-term Care Facilities (LTCF) March 12, 2020

Persons older than 60 years and those with chronic medical conditions such as diabetes, hypertension and cardiovascular disease may be at higher risk for severe illness and death from COVID-19. Long-term care facilities have experience managing respiratory infections and outbreaks among residents and staff and should apply the same outbreak management principles to COVID-19. These recommendations are specific for nursing homes, including skilled nursing facilities, and may be applicable to some assisted living facilities.

- The New Hampshire Division of Public Health Services (DPHS) recommends adherence to [CMS Guidance for Infection Control and Prevention of Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) in nursing homes](#).
- Based on the regional epidemiology, we suggest **limiting visitation** (rather than the more permissive “discouraging visitation”) as described in CMS guidance. Facilities may elect to implement stricter visitor policies, according to their circumstances including resources and setting.
- Facilities should immediately implement **active screening** of visitors. Visitors should be instructed to wash hands or use alcohol-based hand rub upon entry. NH DPHS provides a [visitor screening tool](#) here for facilities to utilize. Note this is modified from the CMS tool to more accurately reflect the evolving epidemic. The NH screening tool assesses visitors for the following:
 - Signs or symptoms of respiratory infection, such as fever, cough, shortness of breath, or sore throat.
 - In the last 14 days, contact with someone with a confirmed diagnosis of COVID-19, or who is under investigation for COVID-19, or is ill with respiratory illness.
 - In the last 14 days, international travel or travel to a U.S. community with community-based spread of COVID-19.
- In addition to the CMS guidance, the CDC has [structured guidance](#) in the following subject areas:
 - Educate Residents, Healthcare Personnel, and Visitors
 - Provide Supplies for Recommended Infection Prevention and Control Practices
 - Evaluate and Manage HCP with Symptoms of Respiratory Illness
 - Consider New Policies and Procedures for Visitors
 - Evaluate and Manage Residents with Symptoms of Respiratory Infection
- Minimize group activities inside the facility or field trips outside of the facility. Group activities to minimize include hosting external groups in facility meeting spaces and inviting external groups in for recreational and entertainment activities.
- Additional Resources:
 - [Visitor Screening Tool](#)
 - [Announcement Poster](#)
 - [NH DHHS Posters](#) (Scroll to bottom of page.)
 - [CDC stay home when sick posters](#)
 - [CDC Transmission Based Precaution Posters](#)
 - [American Health Care Association \(AHCA\) Resources](#)
 - [CDC's Interim Additional Guidance for Infection Prevention and Control for Patients with Suspected or Confirmed COVID-19 in Nursing Homes](#)

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the difference between seasonal coronaviruses and the virus causing COVID-19?

Coronaviruses are a family of viruses. Some coronaviruses cause the common cold, but the virus causing COVID-19 is a new type of coronavirus that we believe moved from animals into humans and is infecting people for the first time.

What are common symptoms of COVID-19?

For confirmed COVID-19 cases, reported illnesses have ranged from mild symptoms to severe illness and death. Symptoms typically include fever, cough, and shortness of breath.

How is COVID-19 spread?

Current understanding about how the virus that causes coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) spreads is largely based on what is known about similar coronaviruses. COVID-19 is a new disease and there is more to learn about how it spreads, the severity of illness it causes, and to what extent it may spread in the United States. COVID-19 is thought to spread from person-to-person, most likely through respiratory droplets, including:

- Through the air by coughing and sneezing;
- Close personal contact, such as touching or shaking hands;
- Touching an object or surface with the virus on it, then touching your mouth, nose, or eyes before washing your hands, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads.

This is similar to how flu and other respiratory infections spread. Until we learn more about how easily COVID-19 spreads between people, healthcare providers may wear special [personal protective equipment](#) (e.g., masks and eye protection) when evaluating a patient if there is a possibility of infection with COVID-19.

How is COVID-19 infection prevented or treated?

Currently, there is no vaccine to prevent infection with this virus, and there is no specific antiviral treatment recommended once infected. The best way to prevent infection is to avoid being exposed to this virus.

How should long term care facilities prepare for the potential of COVID-19 in their facilities?

- Implement the measures recommended on page one of this document.
- Continue to monitor information from public health. See key websites at the end of this document.
- Review, update, and implement emergency operations plans.
- Put alcohol-based hand rub in every resident room (ideally both inside and outside of the room)
 - Make sure any sink is well-stocked with soap and paper towels for hand washing
- Exclude sick employees from work and emphasize respiratory etiquette and frequent hand hygiene by all
- Identify where any residents with confirmed or suspect COVID-19 can safely reside apart. This should be a single room with access to private bathroom. If multiple patients become ill, cohorting ill patients together is an option.
- Perform routine and frequent environmental cleaning, especially of commonly touched surfaces.
- Create communications plans, including strategies for sharing information with staff, volunteers, residents, and their families. Consider proactive communications now. See examples at the end of this document.
- Prepare for possible increased numbers of employee absences. Identify essential functions, essential jobs or roles, and critical elements to maintain facility operations if absences are high. See CDC [guidance](#) for businesses for additional resources around planning for business continuity.

- Assess inventory and ensure supply of PPE recommended for care of patients with COVID-19.
- Review CDC Interim Infection Prevention and Control Recommendations for Patients with Confirmed Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) or Persons Under Investigation for COVID-19 in Healthcare Settings: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/infection-control/control-recommendations.html>
- Review CDC Healthcare Supply of Personal Protective Equipment: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/healthcare-supply-ppe-index.html>

What preventive measures can employees, volunteers, residents and visitors take to help reduce the spread of COVID-19?

- Employees, volunteers, and visitors should stay home until they have been fever-free for at least 24 hours without taking any fever-reducing medication and are feeling better.
- Residents with respiratory illness should stay in their own room until symptoms resolve, including restricting them from common activities, and have their meals served in their room when possible.
- Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue or sleeve. Following use, dispose of tissues into trash and wash hands or use alcohol based hand sanitizer.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
- Wash hands often for at least 20 seconds, especially after coughing or sneezing. Use alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces and objects.

What steps should healthcare workers take when caring for people who may be suspected to have COVID-19?

Healthcare personnel caring for patients with confirmed or possible COVID-19 should adhere to CDC recommendations for [infection prevention and control](#) (IPC):

- Assess residents with acute respiratory symptoms and risk factors for COVID-19.
- Restrict residents with COVID-19 symptoms to their room. If they must leave the room for medically necessary procedures, have them wear a facemask.
- Post [signs](#) on the door or wall outside of the resident room that clearly describe the type of precautions needed and required PPE.
 - Make PPE available immediately outside of the resident room.
 - Position trash cans near the exit inside resident rooms to make it easy for employees to discard PPE.
- Perform hand hygiene with alcohol-based hand rub before and after all patient contact, contact with potentially infectious material, and before putting on and upon removal of PPE, including gloves. Use soap and water if hands are visibly soiled.
- Practice how to properly [don, use, and doff PPE](#) in a manner to prevent self-contamination.
- If the individual requires [immediate](#) medical care, call 911 for an ambulance and inform emergency medical services about the suspicion of COVID-19.
- Notify facilities prior to transferring a resident with an acute respiratory illness, including suspected or confirmed COVID-19, to a higher level of care.
- Call NH DPHS at 603-271-4496 (after-hours: 603-271-5300) to report suspected cases.

There is the potential for COVID-19 transmission to occur within a LTCF resulting in an outbreak. Similar approaches to managing outbreaks of influenza within LTCF will be used to manage any outbreak of COVID-19 that occur in a LTCF. It is critical that any increases in respiratory illness, clusters, or outbreaks are reported immediately to NH DPHS at 603-271-4496 (after-hours 603-271-5300) so that we can work together to implement control measures. Key strategies to control respiratory disease outbreaks in LTCF include restricting movement of residents and staff, restricting admissions, notification and restriction of visitors, and limiting group dining and social events. See CDC Influenza Guidance: Outbreak Management in Long-Term Care Facilities <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/infectioncontrol/ltc-facility-guidance.htm>

What precautions should be taken for employees who have already traveled?

Employees who have returned from locations with Level 3 [travel notices](#) for COVID-19 must be excluded from work and stay at home for 14 days. Employees who have traveled to other international locations may continue to attend work. At the beginning of each shift for the 14 days after their return, they should have their health status assessed by occupational health or their supervisor to ensure they do not have a fever and are not experiencing symptoms of a respiratory illness. They should be counseled that if symptoms develop (e.g. fever, cough, or shortness of breath), they should:

- Seek medical care. Before going to a doctor's office or emergency room, the individual should call ahead and tell the provider or office about recent travel and symptoms.
- Stay home and away from close contact with others.
- Practice strict respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene including covering the nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing and washing hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.

Given sustained community transmission identified in some areas of the United States, it may be appropriate for healthcare facilities to implement active employee monitoring prior to each shift for certain domestic travelers.

What precautions should be taken for employees who are considering travel?

Given the rapidly evolving outbreak and frequently changing travel advisories, healthcare providers should postpone international travel in order to protect their patients and avoid disruption to the healthcare workforce in case of illness during travel or upon return. Healthcare institutions may also request that their employees forego elective travel to locations within the United States where sustained community transmission is occurring or potentially face exclusion from work for 14 days.

You should advise your community:

If you travel, take the following routine precautions:

- *Avoid contact with sick people.*
- *Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.*
- *Clean your hands often by washing them with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains 60%–95% alcohol. Soap and water should be used if hands are visibly dirty. It is especially important to clean hands after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after coughing, sneezing or blowing your nose*

If you travel to a location with COVID-19, when you return, you should remain alert for fever or respiratory symptoms (e.g., cough, shortness of breath). An informational handout on self-observation is available [online](#) and can be provided to travelers.

What cleaning procedures should be followed?

Facilities should routinely clean all frequently touched surfaces such as carts, countertops, and doorknobs. No additional disinfection beyond routine cleaning is recommended at this time. Use the cleaning agents that are usually used in these areas and follow the directions on the label. Refer to [List N](#) on the EPA website for EPA-registered disinfectants that have qualified under EPA's emerging viral pathogens program for use against SARS-CoV-2. Provide disposable wipes so that commonly used surfaces (for example, doorknobs, keyboards, remote controls, desks) can be wiped down by employees, residents and visitors before each use. Management of laundry, food service utensils, and medical waste should also be performed in accordance with routine procedures. Additional information about recommended practices for terminal cleaning of rooms and PPE to be worn by environmental services personnel is available in the [Healthcare Infection Prevention and Control FAQs for COVID-19](#).

What will happen if a person in our facility is diagnosed with COVID-19?

If a person in your facility is diagnosed with COVID-19, NH DPHS will work with your facility to identify close contacts of the person diagnosed and to coordinate messaging to your facility community. NH DPHS will make recommendations for monitoring of close contacts, which will depend on the epidemiology of COVID-19 in the state at that time.

When to Contact Occupational Health Services

If you have an unprotected exposure (i.e., not wearing recommended PPE) to a confirmed or possible COVID-19 patient, contact your supervisor or occupational health immediately. For more information for healthcare personnel, visit: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/hcp/index.html>

Where can I go for the most up-to-date information about the COVID-19 outbreak?

Outbreaks involving COVID-19 evolve quickly and recommendations from public health officials may change as new information becomes available. Please check the following websites often for updated information:

- U.S. CDC website: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>
- NH DPHS website: <https://www.dhhs.nh.gov/dphs/cdcs/2019-ncov.htm>

COVID-19 Visitor Active Screening Tool

To protect everyone, including staff, we are asking all visitors to complete the following questionnaire.

Name: _____

Date: _____

- Do you have signs or symptoms of a respiratory infection, such as fever, cough, shortness of breath, or sore throat?

YES / NO

- In the last 14 days, have you had contact with someone with a confirmed diagnosis of COVID-19, or who is under investigation for COVID-19, or is ill with respiratory illness?

YES / NO

- In the last 14 days, did you travel internationally or to a U.S. community with community-based spread of COVID-19?

YES / NO

Signature: _____

NH Department of Health and Human Services
Division of Public Health Services
Bureau of Infectious Disease Control
<https://www.dhhs.nh.gov/dphs/cdcs/2019-ncov.htm>
Adapted from the [Vermont Department of Health](#).

COVID-19 Announcement

Thank you for coming to visit today. As you may know, the world is experiencing an expanding epidemic of COVID-19. The virus can spread from person-to-person. Older adults and those with underlying medical conditions are at high risk for severe illness and even death.

Before entering our facility, we respectfully require all visitors to confirm:

- You are not currently sick with any fever, cough or signs of respiratory illness.
- You have not be in close proximity with someone who is currently sick with the COVID-19 or any other respiratory illness within the last 14 days.
- You have not travelled within the last 14 days to an area of the world with an active COVID-19 outbreak.

We are taking extra measures to keep our facility clean.
During your time here today, we respectfully ask that you:

- Wash your hands or use provided hand sanitizer often.
- Disinfect all shared surfaces before and after use.
- Please reach out to a staff member if you have any questions or concerns.

Thank you!

Adapted from the [Washington State Department of Health](#).

Sample Letter for LTCF to Families and Friends with General Prevention Information

Dear Families and Friends,

We are writing to provide you an update about Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). It is important for all of us to make sure we are taking precautions to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 and other respiratory illnesses, such as the flu, which we frequently see this time of year.

COVID-19 and many other common respiratory viruses spread through contact with an infected person's respiratory droplets, such as when a person coughs or sneezes. To prevent the spread of respiratory viruses, the CDC recommends that individuals engage in everyday preventive measures to help stop the spread of germs and avoid illness, such as:

- Wash hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use alcohol-based hand sanitizers.
- Avoid touching eyes, mouth and nose with unwashed hands.
- Do not to share personal items such as water bottles, smokes and/or vapes.
- Avoid close contact with individuals who are sick.
- Stay home when you are sick. The CDC recommends that individuals remain home for at least 24 hours after you no longer have a fever or signs of a fever (i.e., chills, feeling warm, flushed appearance).
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then immediately discard the tissue in the trash.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.

Given the susceptibility of our residents, we are taking measures to ensure staff do not come to work ill. *[Insert your policy. Example provided: Additionally, for the safety of our residents, we have elected to limit visitors with certain exceptions. Those visitors that are permitted will be screened for fever or any symptoms of respiratory illness, recent travel to an area of the world with an active COVID-19 outbreak, or contact to a person with COVID-19.]*

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- U.S. CDC website: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>
- NH Division of Public Health Services website: <https://www.dhhs.nh.gov/dphs/cdcs/2019-ncov.htm>

Sincerely,

[Facility administrator's name and signature]

Sample Letter for LTCF to Staff with General Prevention Information

Dear Staff,

We are writing to provide you an update about Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). It is important for all of us to make sure we are taking precautions to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 and other respiratory illnesses, such as the flu, which we frequently see this time of year.

COVID-19 and many other common respiratory viruses spread through contact with an infected person's respiratory droplets, such as when a person coughs or sneezes. To prevent the spread of respiratory viruses, the CDC recommends that individuals engage in everyday preventive measures to help stop the spread of germs and avoid illness, such as:

- Wash hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use alcohol-based hand sanitizers.
- Avoid touching eyes, mouth and nose with unwashed hands.
- Do not to share personal items such as water bottles, smokes and/or vapes.
- Avoid close contact with individuals who are sick.
- Stay home when you are sick. You must stay home for at least 24 hours after you no longer have a fever or signs of a fever (i.e., chills, feeling warm, flushed appearance).
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then immediately discard the tissue in the trash.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.

In addition to these personal prevention measures, our facility staff should avoid all travel to settings with community transmission of COVID-19. Please communicate your travel plans to administration prior to travel so we can all take steps to best protect our workforce and the patients we care for. See CDC's website for current travel information: <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/notices>.

Outbreaks involving COVID-19 evolve quickly and recommendations from public health officials may change as new information becomes available. Please check the following websites often for updated information:

- U.S. CDC website: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>
- NH Division of Public Health Services website: <https://www.dhhs.nh.gov/dphs/cdcs/2019-ncov.htm>

Sincerely,

[Facility administrator's name and signature]