

Visitation Restrictions Lifted for LTC Facilities

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Following a year of COVID-19 lockdowns, families now can visit their loved ones in long-term care facilities with fewer federally mandated restrictions.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) [has lifted restrictions for Medicare and Medicaid facilities](#). In doing so on March 10, CMS is banking on an effective nationwide effort to vaccinate nursing home residents and staff, while acknowledging the health benefits of visitation in combating the distress and isolation experienced by many seniors.

Beginning this month, CMS is permitting indoor visitation for all residents (regardless of vaccination status), except in a few circumstances that pose an increased risk, as when:

- The visit relates to an unvaccinated resident if the county's COVID-19 positivity rate is greater than 10%, and less than 70% of the facility's residents are vaccinated.
- The resident has a confirmed case of COVID-19 infection.
- The resident is in quarantine.

Even with the eased restrictions, CMS continues to encourage outdoor visitation whenever possible. CMS also recommends limiting the total number of visitors in the facility at a given time, scheduling visits for a specified length of time and restricting visitor movement within the facility, or creating a designated visitation area. CMS also cautions that visits of residents who share a room should not be conducted in the residents' room.

Regardless of how visits are conducted, CMS insists that facilities continue to employ the core principals of COVID-19 infection prevention, which include:

- Screening visitors for signs and symptoms of COVID-19 infection
- Encouragement of hand hygiene
- Face covering or masks
- Social distancing of at least six feet
- Instructional signage and visitor education
- Cleaning and disinfecting frequently
- Appropriate staff use of personal protective equipment
- Separating residents from those with COVID-19

- Continued resident and staff testing

Although the CMS guidance applies only to nursing homes with Medicare or Medicaid patients, it opens the door for all long-term care facilities to offer both indoor and outdoor visitation that complies with these new safety standards. This gives facilities the necessary framework for reopening visitation to address both the physical and emotional needs of their residents. Still, facilities should proceed cautiously with all reopening activities, and continue to monitor both federal and state agency guidance for specific protocols and requirements.

If you have any questions about the new CMS visitation guidance, please [contact me](#) or any member of the [Barley Snyder Senior Living Industry Group](#).

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