

COVID-19 and Long-term Care Facilities

A Message to Family members and Friends of Residents in Long-Term Care Facilities

COVID-19 has had a major impact on all our lives in ways we were not prepared for. However, we want to assure you that our priority is the health and safety of individuals living in or cared for by nursing homes and long-term care facilities (LTCF). This is a rapidly evolving situation, and we have taken steps to assist in mitigating the negative effect this pandemic may have on your loved one in the LTCF.

Some of the measures taken are difficult on residents and family members, such as the no visitation rule. Pursuant to Governor Stitt's Executive Order 2020-06 and President Trump's declaration of a National Public Health Emergency, visitations continue to be restricted in order to protect all residents in the facility. We appreciate your understanding and cooperation in helping to keep all residents safe.

We understand it is extremely important for family and friends to communicate with their loved one. Ask the facility what their plan is for helping families stay connected during this time. We encourage you to try some of these suggested methods:

- Call and talk on the telephone/cell phone.
- Send handwritten letters and cards.
- Use technology, such as video conferencing (Skype, FaceTime), Facebook, text message, or email.
- Make video greetings, through apps such as WhatsApp and Marco Polo.
- "Visit" through a window or glass door.
- Ask LTCF staff to help residents write messages to family/friends on large pieces of paper and take picture of resident holding message to send back to loved ones.
- Provide cloth masks for your family member for times they would like to go out of their room.

What You Can Expect From the Long-Term Care Facility:

The LTCF staff are working to keep your family member safe and healthy by implementing the following measures:

- Anyone entering the building is actively screened (e.g., cough, fever, congestion, illness, etc.) for COVID-19.
- When possible, residents are asked to cover their noses and mouth when staff are in the room, and also when the resident leaves their room, including for whether they have COVID symptoms or not. Residents may use tissues for this, or could also use cloth, or other non-medical masks, when available.
- If COVID-19 transmission occurs in the facility, residents are moved to a designated room/wing within the current facility, if possible and staffing allows; or transferred to a local facility accepting COVID+ residents.
- Staff are following CDC and OSDH's guidelines on the use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). Due to PPE shortages, LTCFs are implementing CDC's recommended crisis strategies to conserve PPE for care of COVID+ residents.

- Designated staffing teams for COVID-19-positive residents are implemented, when possible, and if staffing is not an issue.

Additional Oklahoma State Department of Health Measures

Hospital Discharge Testing

The Oklahoma State Department of Health (OSDH) provided key guidance regarding testing and discharging residents from the hospital to a long-term care facility (LTCF). Residents with no history of COVID-19 who are being discharged from the hospital to a LTC facility will receive one COVID-19 test, with results returned within 48 hours prior to discharge. OSDH has implemented measures to identify these tests to be eligible for priority processing through the Public Health Lab. These tests will enable the hospital, LTC staff, and family members to identify if the resident was COVID+ at the time of hospital discharge.

There are no CDC requirements for the discharge testing to occur, but OSDH has implemented this measure to ease concerns and help protect our residents and the employees who care for them.

- If **negative**, the resident will be discharged according to plan, where facility-specific protocols will be initiated.
- If **positive**, the resident will be discharged to one of the following LTC facilities (in priority order):
 - Originating LTC facility (if facility has COVID + residents and is engaging in rooming residents together that are both COVID + protocols. Also known as Cohorting residents).
 - Local LTC facility with cohorting COVID + residents.
 - COVID+ transitional care facility.

Staffing Concerns

In order to address the concern of staffing shortages, OSDH contacted staffing agencies and confirmed contract staff are available to care for COVID+ residents. This information has been shared with the LTCFs and they have been encouraged to contact the Service Director of the Long-Term Care Survey Department of any staffing related issues and/or concerns.

Facility Reporting

Current requirements at 42 CFR 483.80 and CDC guidance specify that LTCF (specifically nursing homes) notify State or Local health department about:

- Residents or staff with suspected or confirmed COVID-19
- Residents with severe respiratory infection resulting in hospitalization or death, or
- If there are three or greater residents or staff with new-onset of respiratory symptoms within 72 hours of each other

Effective May 8, 2020, nursing homes are required to provide COVID-19 information through the CDC's National Health Safety Network (NHSN) system. CMS is only collecting nursing home (i.e., skilled nursing facility and/or nursing facility) data and not assisted living or developmental disability facility types.

In addition to requiring reporting to CDC, nursing homes (and we encourage assisted living and other long-term care facility types to follow this guidance) will also be required to notify residents and their representatives of the conditions inside the facility. This is separate from the reporting required to CDC in

that this information will be shared by the nursing home/LTCF directly with residents and their representatives. At a minimum, once these requirements are in place, nursing homes/LTCFs must inform residents and their representatives:

- Within 12 hours of a confirmed infection of a single resident, and each subsequent time other occurrences are confirmed, and
- If three or more residents or staff with new-onset of respiratory symptoms that occur within 72 hours.
- Also, updates to residents and their representatives must be provided weekly, and
- Facilities will include information on mitigating actions implemented to prevent or reduce the risk of transmission, including if normal operations in the nursing home/LTCF will be altered.
- This information must be reported in accordance with existing privacy regulations and statute.

What to Do If You Have Concerns

We understand that you are more concerned than ever about your loved one who currently lives in a long-term care facility. Given that you are unable to see your family member, your concerns are understandable due to the pandemic and the elderly being so susceptible to the virus.

Even with limited access, we encourage you to visit as frequently as possible and attempt to visually see your family member. If you notice a change, or something that causes you concern, call and speak to the Director of Nursing and/or the Administrator. Ask how the facility will provide updates on your loved one.

Possible questions you may want to ask include:

- What is the LTCF doing to prevent infections?
- What is the plan for the LTCF to communicate important information to both residents and families on a regular basis?
- Is the LTCF currently at full staffing levels for nurses, aides, and other workers?

If you feel the concern and/or your questions were not appropriately addressed, contact your State Ombudsman. An ombudsman is an advocate for the resident and helps to ensure their rights are being followed. If you prefer, they can help you with any complaint or concern you are having and their services are free of charge. Whatever you tell the Ombudsman is confidential unless you give permission for him/her to share the information. To find your local ombudsman go to:

<http://www.okdhs.org/services/aging/Pages/ombudsman.aspx>

You may also file a complaint with the Long-term Care Survey Department at OSDH.

To Submit a Complaint Click Here or call 405-271-6868.

For further COVID-19 Information and Resources visit:

- OSDH Coronavirus Website at: <https://coronavirus.health.ok.gov/>
- LTC Coronavirus Resource page at: <https://www.ok.gov/health/Protective Health/Long Term Care Service/LTC COVID-19 Resources/index.html>
- QIES Educational Resource page at: <https://www.ok.gov/health/Protective Health/Quality Improvement and Evaluation Service/Minimum Data Set/Educational Resources/index.html>
- Centers for Disease Control Preparing for COVID-19 in Long-term Care Facilities: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/long-term-care.html>