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MDHHS updates Residential Care Facilities Order to reflect recent changes in CMS guidance, continue protecting seniors

LANSING, MICH. Today, the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) updated its [Residential Care Facilities Order](#) to reflect recent changes in [Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services guidance for visitation](#). The state recently rolled out an expanded visitation program, using a testing protocol to keep residents and staff safe. The updated order and accompanying guidance continues to support visitation and improve quality of life for seniors while maintaining precautions to help keep residents and staff safe. Testing is strongly encouraged prior to visitation, particularly in counties with medium or high positivity, but not required. The order goes into effect immediately.

“Throughout the pandemic we have focused on protecting vulnerable long-term care residents from COVID-19, which has required physical separation from family and other loved ones,” said Elizabeth Hertel, MDHHS director. “The new CMS guidance provides reasonable ways these facilities can safely facilitate in-person visitation to address the needs of residents.”

Michigan has made protecting the health and safety of our seniors and most vulnerable residents a top priority. The state acted quickly to slow the spread of the virus in nursing homes, followed CDC guidance, secured PPE, provided more than 1.3 million antigen tests for patients and staff, recorded results of more than 650,000 PCR tests and administered more than 270,000 vaccines for nursing home residents and staff. As a result, Michigan has a lower rate of nursing home deaths than the national average, according to an independent study conducted by the Center for Health and Research Transformation at the University of Michigan.

[The order](#) continues to require facilities to:

- Make efforts to allow safe communal dining and group activities for residents.
- Inform employees and residents of the presence of a confirmed COVID-19 positive employee or resident as soon as reasonably possible, but no later than 12 hours after identification.
- Inform legal guardians or healthcare proxies for all residents and post a visible notice in the facility, no later than 24 hours after identification of a confirmed COVID-19 positive employee or resident.
- Report to MDHHS and the applicable local health department all presumed positive COVID-19 cases in the facility together with any additional data when required under MDHHS guidance.

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“While we are still very much fighting this pandemic and seeing some concerning trends in new cases and hospitalizations, these new changes align with CDC guidance and support families being able to visit their loved ones in nursing facilities,” said Dr. Joneigh Khaldun, chief medical executive and chief deputy for health. “We continue to monitor the data closely and urge Michiganders to continue doing what works to slow the spread of the disease by wearing a mask, washing their hands, avoiding crowds and making a plan to get the safe and effective COVID-19 vaccine when it is their turn.”

CMS guidance says facilities should accommodate and support indoor and outdoor visitation as long as the facility has not had a new COVID-19 case in the last 14 days. Visitors will be required to wear face masks or other personal protective equipment when required by the facility at all times. In general, visitors will need to maintain six feet from residents.

The new MDHHS Residential Care Facilities Visitation Guidance covers nursing homes, home for the aged, adult foster care facilities, hospice, substance use disorder residential and assisted living facilities.

Information around this outbreak is changing rapidly. The latest information is available at Michigan.gov/Coronavirus and CDC.gov/Coronavirus. To learn more about the COVID-19 vaccine, visit Michigan.gov/COVIDVaccine.

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