

# JUSTICE IN AGING

FIGHTING SENIOR POVERTY THROUGH LAW

## Revised COVID-19 Guidance for Nursing Facility Visits

*Updated March 11, 2020*

### Visits Restricted, Precautions Urged

Due to the increasing spread of coronavirus (COVID-19), the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) has issued [revised guidance](#) that puts stricter limits on visits to nursing facility residents. Under the revised guidance, a nursing facility should screen visitors (and staff members) to determine if they fall into one of four categories:

1. Travel within the preceding two weeks to a country with sustained community transmission (currently China, Iran, Italy, South Korea, and Japan);
2. Contact within the past two weeks with someone who either has a COVID-19 diagnosis, is “under investigation” for COVID-19, or is ill with a respiratory illness;
3. Symptoms of a respiratory infection, “such as fever, cough, shortness of breath, or sore throat;” or
4. Resides in a community which has “community-based spread” of COVID-19.

If a person falls into one of these four categories, they cannot visit in-person. As an alternative, CMS suggests that a “restricted” person could speak to a resident through a phone call or video chat.

In other circumstances, visits should be either “limited” or “discouraged,” according to CMS. The requirement of “limited” visits is based not on the condition of the proposed visitor, but rather on the county in which the facility is located. Specifically: if a COVID-19 case has occurred in that same county or in an adjacent county, a nursing facility only allows visits for “certain situations, such as when the resident is at the end of life” or “a visitor is essential for the resident’s emotional well-being and care.”

In all other counties, and in all other situations, visits are to be “discouraged.” Visits are allowed, but the facility advises persons to not visit until further notice.

When visits do occur, the visitor should only go to the resident’s room or a designated “clean” room, rather than to the facility’s shared areas. Facilities may require visitors to use personal protective equipment such as face masks. Hugs and handshakes should be avoided; the guidance instead suggests remaining six feet apart. In addition, facilities should take other protective measures, such as providing sanitizer and instructions for hand sanitizing, and offering temperature checks.

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**Caution for Admissions from Hospital**

The revised CMS guidance also calls for taking greater precautions in admitting residents from hospitals. As in the original version, the guidance advises nursing facilities to admit any persons that they “would normally admit,” including persons from hospitals where COVID-19 is present. The revised guidance, however, adds the suggestion that the nursing facility create a unit exclusively for residents coming from the hospital. Residents could remain in the unit for 14 days and then, presumably free from COVID-19, could move elsewhere in the nursing facility.

**Continuing CMS Guidance on Response to COVID-19**

CMS maintains a [webpage](#) containing much of its guidance related to COVID-19. The page is updated as guidance is released or modified.