

Dear Family Members, Responsible Party, & Residents,

I am cautiously optimistic to share the new visitation guidance that has been published by CMS. The guidance will be posted to our COVID page on our website for your viewing. As you read through the guidance, it is important to focus on a key principle that is discussed and referenced throughout the document, "Core Principles of COVID-19 Infection Prevention." This means that the facility is minimally required by regulation to maintain core principles of infection prevention while supporting visitation.

I think it is important to note that this is federal guidance being provide to all nursing homes throughout the United States without regard to the current impact COVID-19 is having on any state or county. With that being said, I am sure all of you know that Michigan is experiencing a COVID surge with the highest rate of new infections in the country. The weekly positivity rate is the highest it has been since the earliest days of the pandemic when there was limited testing.

<https://www.bridgemi.com/michigan-health-watch/coronavirus-tracker-what-michigan-needs-know-now>

We all need to remain vigilant to ensure that our residents, who are compromised, are protected. Now is not the time to let our guard down. I am pleased to share that the facility has completed its second booster clinic this week to provide additional protection against anyone, including visitors and/or staff, that might expose our residents to COVID-19.

Here are some highlights from the guidance:

1. Visitors should still be screened.
2. Visitors that have tested positive in the last 14 days and/or have symptoms of COVID will not be allowed to visit.
3. Visitor must be educated regarding the risks associated with visitation.
4. Visits must occur in a manner that does not place other residents at risk (one example would be a shared room, this may pose a risk to the other resident).
5. Visits can be conducted through different means based on a facility's structure and residents' needs, such as in resident rooms, dedicated visitation spaces, and outdoors.
6. Visitors must wear PPE (personal protective equipment) – which is currently, surgical mask and Face shield to reduce the risk of exposure to staff and other residents.
7. Visitors must always adhere to social distancing.
8. Facilities should avoid large gatherings where large numbers of visitors are in the same space at the same time.
9. Visitor movement should be limited within the facility. For example, visitors should not walk around the facility, but rather go directly to the resident's room or designated visitation area.
10. Visitors who are unable to adhere to the core principles of COVID-19 infection prevention should not be permitted to visit or should be asked to leave.
11. CMS does not recommend visitation during an active outbreak or with residents who are on transmission-based precautions or quarantine, but visitation is still permitted if core principles of infection prevention are followed. Visitors must be made aware of the risks and wear appropriate PPE regardless of vaccination status of the resident or visitor.
12. Counties with substantial or high levels of community transmission may offer testing, if feasible, and/or encourage visitors to be tested on their own before coming to the facility (e.g. within 2-3 days).
13. CMS strongly encourages all visitors to become vaccinated and facilities should educate and encourage visitors to become vaccinated. Visitor testing and vaccination can help prevent the spread of COVID-19 and facilities may ask about a visitors' vaccination status, however, visitors are not required to test or be vaccinated or show proof of vaccination.
14. CMS states facilities must have a **reasonable clinical or safety cause** to restrict visitation.

15. CMS guidance allows for the facility to consult with the local health department for guidance or direction on how to structure visitation to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission.

So, what does all of this mean for our visitors?

After consultation with our local health department, the Facility is following their recommendation regarding visitation based on the following factors:

1. The facility is currently in an active outbreak.
2. Our county community transmission is currently at substantial/high levels, in fact, it is at the highest it has been since the earliest days of the pandemic.
3. Michigan is currently experiencing a COVID surge.
4. The facility has a responsibility to protect not only the residents, but its employees from visitors in the building.
5. The facility must monitor the number of visitors, vendors, volunteers, and staff that are in the building at any given moment to ensure core principles of COVID-19 infection prevention are maintained.
6. Based on the size, structure, and current staffing level of the facility, it is unreasonable to monitor multiple unscheduled visits throughout the facility to maintain core principles of COVID-19 infection prevention, which would cause clinical and safety concerns for residents and staff members.

Therefore, effective 11/25/2021, for the safety of all the residents and staff, visitation will be permitted in the following manner:

1. Residents residing in a private room will be permitted in room visitation under the following conditions:
 - a. The visitor contacts the facility 24 hours in advance of the visit to advise of the date, time, number of people attending, and their vaccination status.
 - b. The visitor may be asked to select a different date/time depending on the number of people in the building on any given day to ensure safety and appropriate social distancing.
 - c. The visitors screen.
 - d. The visitors always wear a surgical mask and Face Shield, as well as additional PPE based on the resident's current care planned needs.
 - e. The visitors will be escorted to the resident room.
 - f. The visitors will always stay in the resident room, unless leaving to use the public restroom, and will not interact with the staff members.
 - g. Questions will be directed via phone call to the nurse's station, rather than in person at the nurse's station.
 - h. Visitors that do not follow this guidance will be asked to leave and will not be permitted to visit.
2. Residents residing in a semi-private room will be permitted visitation under the following conditions:
 - a. The visitor contacts the facility 24 hours in advance of the visit to advise of the date/time, including the number of people attending, and their vaccination status.
 - b. The visitor may be asked to select a different date/time depending on the number of people in the building on any given day to ensure safety and appropriate social distancing.

- c. If all the designated visiting rooms are unavailable, the visitor will need to choose a different date/time to visit.
- d. The visitors screen.
- e. The visitors always wear a surgical mask and Face Shield.
- f. The visitors will be escorted to the designated private visiting area.
- g. The visitors will stay in the designated area, unless leaving to use the public restroom, and will not interact with the staff members.
- h. Questions will be directed via phone call to the nurse's station, rather than in person, as we do not have physical barriers in place to permit this interaction at this time.
- i. Visitors that do not follow this guidance will be asked to leave and will not be permitted to visit.

While it is a resident right to receive visitors as he/she chooses, that resident's rights cannot interfere with any other resident. All residents have the right to be free from the potential exposure to COVID-19 and while some families might be willing to take the risk during this time, others may not. We must protect the rights of all our resident. I appreciate your understanding.

I am happy to be able to expand visitation for our residents and family members. I am hopeful that we can do this in the safest way possible for our residents and staff. I thank you for your patience and understanding and look forward to expanding visitation further as conditions in Michigan, our county, and the facility change.

Please feel free to reach out to me with questions and we can work together to ensure that everyone's needs are safely met during the ongoing pandemic. Thank you for allowing us to care for your loved one during these very difficult times. Wishing all of you a Happy Thanksgiving!

Respectfully,

Martha Richard
Administrator