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# CMS Urging Nursing Homes to Follow Established COVID Guidelines This Holiday Season

November 18, 2020

Today, in advance of the approaching holiday season, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) is urging nursing home staff, residents and visitors to follow established guidelines for visitation and adherence to the core principles of infection prevention. These guidelines include remaining six feet apart from individuals, wearing a face covering, and limiting the number of visitors in the nursing home at any one time. Adherence to these principles is critical in preventing the spread of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) in America's nursing homes. While the holiday season is typically a time for family and friends to gather, CMS implores staff, residents and visitors to exercise extreme caution this year.

“Thanks to President Trump’s leadership, progress on a vaccine is proceeding at a pace worthy of the name Operation Warp Speed. Nevertheless, the approaching holiday season remains fraught with danger for the vulnerable residents of America’s nursing homes,” said Administrator Seema Verma. “They have already endured loss and loneliness to a degree that would have been unthinkable before this year began, but they and their families – along with facilities themselves – must not let their guard down over the holiday season, especially with a safe and effective vaccine so close to reality.”

The agency understands the emotional and mental health impact that separation from loved ones during the pandemic has caused. In September, CMS [provided guidance](#) for how residents can safely receive visitors in the nursing home. With the holiday season approaching, residents will want to spend more time with their loved ones, and CMS is recommending that facilities find innovative ways of recognizing the holidays without having parties or gatherings that could increase the risk of COVID-19 transmission (e.g., virtual parties or visits).



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CMS also acknowledges that some residents may want to leave the nursing home temporarily to visit with family and friends for the holidays, or for other outings. A resident has the right to leave the nursing home, and CMS urges that extra precautions be taken to help reduce the spread of COVID-19, which poses an elevated danger to the health of nursing home residents. Nursing homes should double down on infection control and adhere to testing requirements.

Extra precautions taken now will help to ensure that our loved ones stay healthy and safe for the short amount of time remaining until a safe and effective vaccine becomes available. Leaving the nursing home could increase a resident's risk for exposure to COVID-19. The risk may be further increased by factors such as a resident's health status, the level of COVID-19 in the community (e.g., cases or positivity rate), or attendance at large gatherings. Residents are encouraged to discuss these and other risks with their family and nursing home staff. Nursing homes should educate residents and families of the risks of leaving the facility, the steps they should take to reduce the risk of contracting COVID-19, and encourage residents can stay connected with loved ones through alternative means of communication, such as phone and video communication.

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