



Department of Health

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DATE: March 17, 2023
TO: Nursing Homes, Local Health Departments
FROM: New York State Department of Health

Health Advisory

Update: Nursing Home Visitor Testing and Screening for COVID-19

Please distribute immediately to: Operators, Nursing Home Administrators, Directors of Nursing, Infection Preventionists and Medical Directors

The purpose of this health advisory is to announce that the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) is fully aligning with the [Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services \(CMS\) Nursing Home Visitation - COVID-19 \(REVISED\)](#) regarding nursing home COVID-19 screening and visitor testing. **Specifically, nursing homes are no longer required to verify that visitors have a negative COVID-19 test before entry or conduct active COVID-19 screening.**

This advisory supersedes all previous NYSDOH requirements related to nursing home screening and visitor testing including, but not limited to, requirements outlined in DAL NH 21-30, issued on January 4, 2022, and *Health Advisory: Nursing Home Testing, Cohorting and Visitation Guidance*, issued on October 13, 2022.

The Department recommends that facilities continue to conduct passive screening, **including instructional signage throughout the facility and proper visitor education on COVID-19 signs and symptoms, infection control precautions, and other applicable facility practices (e.g., use of face covering or mask; specified entries, exits and routes to designated areas; and hand hygiene).** **Facilities that choose to continue visitor testing and/or active screening may do so at their discretion.** Active screening refers to requiring anyone entering the facility to complete a symptom screening questionnaire or an in-person interview and/or have their temperature taken before being allowed entry into the facility.

For more information on establishing a process to identify and manage individuals with suspected or confirmed SARS-CoV-2 infection, please refer to the [CDC guidance here](#).

Facilities are reminded of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) Nursing Home Visitation - COVID-19 (REVISED) guidance that while not required, facilities in counties with high levels of community transmission are encouraged to offer testing to visitors, if feasible. If facilities do not offer testing, it is recommended that they encourage visitors to be tested on their own before coming to the facility (e.g., within 2-3 days).

Nursing homes are advised that all staff and visitors should continue to adhere to the [core principles of COVID-19 infection prevention](#). Those principles include:

- Although COVID-19 testing is no longer required, facilities should provide guidance (e.g., posted signs at entrances) about recommended actions for visitors who have a positive viral test for COVID-19, symptoms of COVID-19, or have had close contact with someone with COVID-19. If the visitor is aware that they are positive or had a recent exposure they should defer non-urgent, in-person visitation until they meet [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) criteria for healthcare settings to end isolation](#). For visitors who have had close contact with someone with COVID-19 infection, it is safest to defer non-urgent, in-person visitation until 10 days after their close contact, if they meet criteria described in CDC healthcare guidance (e.g., cannot wear source control).
- Hand hygiene. Use of alcohol-based hand rub is preferred when hands are not visibly soiled. Otherwise, soap and water hand washing should be performed.
- Face covering or mask (covering mouth and nose) in accordance with the most up-to-date [CDC recommendations](#).
- Instructional signage throughout the facility and proper visitor education on COVID-19 signs and symptoms, infection control precautions, other applicable facility practices (e.g., use of face covering or mask; specified entries, exits and routes to designated areas; and hand hygiene).
- Frequent cleaning and disinfection of high-touch surfaces in the facility and designated visitation areas after each visit.
- Appropriate staff use of personal protective equipment (PPE).
- Effective cohorting of residents (e.g., separate areas dedicated to COVID-19 care).
- Resident and staff testing conducted as required at 42 CFR § 483.80(h) (see [QSO- 20-38-NH](#)).
- The risk of COVID transmission can be further reduced using physical barriers (e.g., clear Plexiglass dividers, curtains).
- Also, nursing homes should enable visits to be conducted with an adequate degree of privacy.

These core principles are consistent with current CDC recommendations for nursing homes and should be adhered to. Additionally, visitation should be person-centered, consider the residents' physical, mental, and psychosocial well-being, and support their quality of life.

Facilities that wish to continue visitor testing may continue requesting quantities in the monthly HERDS survey. Test kits will be distributed from the NYS stockpile, while supplies last. If a facility has an ongoing need for these assets beyond resources available from NYS, they should explore procurement options to maintain needed supply. In the event of a supply issue or an emergent need for test kits, a request may be made through the county Office of Emergency Management (OEM) in which the facility is located for submission to the State via NY Responds.

Questions about this advisory can be sent to covidnursinghomeinfo@health.ny.gov or icp@health.ny.gov.