

November 19, 2020

Holiday letter to LTC families

As we begin the holiday season, the Commonwealth is offering some considerations and recommendations on how to celebrate the holidays with your loved ones who reside in a nursing home. We know that the holidays are important for loved ones as a time to come together and be together. As you make plans to visit and celebrate with your loved one, we encourage you to assess the risk of getting or spreading COVID-19.

Staying Safe this Holiday Season

The Department of Public Health (DPH) released [guidance](#) earlier this month that all Massachusetts residents should follow, offering considerations for how to keep friends, families and our communities' safe during the holiday season. While any gathering poses some risk, you can reduce the risk of getting or spreading COVID-19 by wearing a mask, keeping the guest list small and limited to one household, and keeping visits short when social distancing cannot be maintained.

There are important considerations when planning celebrations with a loved one who lives in a nursing home. Many people living in nursing homes are uniquely vulnerable to COVID-19 and may have health conditions putting them at a higher risk of becoming sick, or even severely ill, with COVID-19. When determining whether to include your loved one in a holiday gathering, it is important to take into account both the health and safety of your loved one, as well as the health and safety of your loved one's roommates, other people living at the nursing home and the staff that care for them.

There are a number of ways you can celebrate the holidays with your loved one. Due to the rapidly rising rate of cases across the state and country and in our community, we recommend participating in a lower-risk visit with your loved one.

Examples of Ways to Celebrate:

- **Low risk:** Celebrate virtually with your loved one using methods such as Skype, Face Time, WhatsApp, or Google Duo. Window visits are also an option for many.
- **Low-medium risk:** Visit your loved one at the facility. Outdoor visits when weather allows is safest. In door visits can also be scheduled. Bring their favorite Thanksgiving food or a holiday treat, following safety guidelines including mask wearing, hand washing, and social distancing. The risk level of a visit to the facility depends on the number of visitors and the potential exposure to COVID-19 that any of the visitors may have had.
- **Medium-high risk:** Bring your loved one home to celebrate with just your household, following safety guidelines including mask wearing, hand washing, social distancing, and frequent cleaning of high touch surfaces. For two weeks prior to your holiday gatherings, limit exposure to COVID-19 by avoiding indoor settings with people you don't live with where you cannot socially distance or wear a mask (e.g., indoor social events, restaurants, carpooling). Your loved one will be required to quarantine for 14 days upon return to the facility unless they are recovered from COVID-19 for less than six months. Currently only the recently recovered COVID-19 residents meet the criteria for less than six months. If

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your loved one must quarantine, they may be asked to quarantine in a temporary room. Please discuss plans for visit with Nurse Manager or Social Worker as arrangements for quarantine will need to be made in advance.

- **Very high risk:** Bring your loved one home to celebrate with multiple households with or without compliance to social distancing, handwashing, cleaning, or mask guidance.

For the safety of your loved one and the community, we encourage you to communicate with the facility before making plans to bring your loved one home to understand their policies and ensure your celebration is as safe as possible.

Additional Resources

In addition to discussing with your loved one's facility or residence, there are resources available to discuss how to safely celebrate with your loved one. Families of loved ones in long-term care settings can contact the **Nursing Home Family Resource at 617-660-5399**. We hope that you and your loved ones have a safe and healthy holiday season.

*The above content is from the 11/13/2020 letter from Marylou Sudders, Secretary, Executive of-
fice of Health and Human Services, Department of Public Health*