# Frequently Asked Questions: Long Term Care & COVID-19

# Version date: June 17, 2020

1. **Are there any upcoming events for family members of residents?**

Yes! As we mentioned last week, the National Consumer Voice for Quality Long Term Care is sponsoring a webinar tomorrow, June 18 at 2 pm ET. This webinar will provide information and tips on how to family members can advocate for quality care individually and through family councils.  The webinar will also cover topics of particular concern to family members, including visitation, facility transparency and reporting requirements, transfers and discharges, COVID-19 testing and more.  You can register for the webinar on the Consumer Voice website (theconsumervoice.org).

1. **What type of visiting is currently allowed for long term care residents?**

Currently, the state allows for virtual visits and window visits. Virtual visits should be encouraged by facility staff for all residents regardless of COVID-19 status. These visits may include a simple phone call or a video call on a wireless phone. They could also be done through electronic forms of communication using applications like Zoom or Skype on computers, IPads or other tablets. Remember that **nursing homes** have the opportunity to apply for grant funds from the State Medicaid Agency to purchase electronic equipment for this purpose.

As we mentioned on previous calls, window visits can be a great way to put your eyes on your loved one and allow them to see you. We do caution that these visits should be planned with the resident or the facility staff in advance to ensure that the resident is not startled at the sight of someone outside the window. For residents without an accessible window on the ground floor, ask the facility staff if the resident could meet with you at a different window, like an empty room or office, the dining or activity room if it’s not in use, or another area that is safe for the resident and the visitor. We also want visitors to use extra care when leaving the sidewalk or parking lot as the areas around the windows may be uneven, and please don’t stomp on the daisies.

1. **I haven’t been able to visit my mom in over two months. What is the status of allowing outdoor in-person visits?**

We understand how hard it is to not be able to visit with your loved one in a manner that does not include electronic devices or a window between the two of you. Outdoor in-person visits are still not allowed in Michigan for long term care residents. We have asked the state for clarification on these types of visits as we are unsure where this restriction is detailed in an executive order or guidance. We understand the state is addressing outdoor visits in the reopening plan currently being developed by the state with stakeholder input. We also recognize that there is no lack of compassion on behalf of our state contacts for this very difficult issue, but there is a public health concern that these visits could introduce or reintroduce COVID to residents or staff. We will be sure to keep you posted as we receive clarification or when guidance is released.

1. **On previous calls, you talked about urging the state to permit more liberal visitation for people on hospice. Has there been any progress on that?**

Sadly, no. We have pushed that issue pretty hard the past two weeks. We know it is being considered by high level state officials because we have raised it with multiple individuals by email and in telephone calls. We also shared the very compelling concerns raised by one of the participants on this call. Those thoughts helped shape our advocacy and made us think about issues including why it might be important for more than one person to be able to visit at a time or for a resident to have more than one visit a day, the importance of children being allowed to visit when appropriate, the importance of permitting clergy to visit, and other issues. We have received confirmation from state officials that they think this is a priority issue but we have not seen any clarification yet. We know it is hard to be patient when every day with a loved one on hospice is so precious but we hope to have news soon and will continue to raise this forcefully at every opportunity. If necessary, we could consider seeking an injunction in court to permit visitation.

We also feel as a concerned family member that you might want to consider writing a letter to the governor to stress the benefits of a compassionate care visit for the resident and tell her the resident’s story. She needs to hear about the residents being impacted by this interpretation of her Executive Order and this may will help balance the push back those well-intended and charged with protecting the overall public health. We applaud those families who have written to her already.

1. **When visits and activities are allowed, will they be allowed for people who are COVID-positive or only for people who are COVID-negative? I think a resident who is COVID-positive might be even more in need of a visitor than someone who is negative.**

We share this concern. We don’t know yet how Michigan will answer this question but we know many other states are limiting visits to people who are COVID-negative. This precaution was likely implemented to prevent the resident from spreading the virus to his or her visitors or to others participating in the activities. We think visits might sometimes be appropriate to a resident with COVID-19 as long as the visitor has appropriate PPE and other precautions are taken. We also think residents on a COVID-positive unit who are feeling well might be able to participate in some activities with other COVID-positive residents. We are raising these issues with the state to try to find the right balance between safety and quality of life.

1. **I know the federal government required nursing homes to report a lot of information. But what information does the state collect about what is going on in Michigan nursing homes?**

The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services issued a new order this week that outlines reporting requirements for nursing homes. Every day, nursing homes have to report dozens of categories of information to the state including the number ofCOVID-19 cases, suspected cases, and deaths of both nursing home residents and staff; how much PPE the facility has including various types of masks, gloves, and eye protection; how many supplies like hand sanitizer and ventilator supplies they have; how many residents are transferred to the hospital or hubs; how many residents have recovered; and other information.

1. **What happens if a nursing home doesn’t report what it is required to report?**

Under the order released by MDHHS this week, a nursing home that does not comply with the testing or reporting requirements of the order could get be fined $1000/day. There can also be penalties from the federal government if nursing homes fail to report the required information to CMS.

1. **Do the requirements in this new order apply to assisted living facilities?**

No. MDHHS’s order this week only applies to nursing homes.

1. **What testing will nursing homes be doing now?**

With the consent of the individual being tested or someone with legal authority to make medical decisions for that person, there will be:

i. Baseline testing of all residents and staff;

ii. Testing of all new or returning residents unless they were tested in the last 72 hours before they came to the nursing home;

iii. Testing any resident or staff member with symptoms or who might have been exposed to the virus;

iv. Weekly testing of all residents and staff in facilities with any positive cases among residents or staff, until 14 days after the last new positive case;

v. Additional testing of staff depending on what region of the state the nursing home is in.

1. **Does this apply to hospices?**

If the hospice is licensed as a nursing home, the staff at the hospice have to be tested just like staff at nursing homes in that region. Hospice residents can be tested with their consent or the consent of someone who has legal authority to make medical decisions for them.

1. **Do nursing homes have enough tests to do all the testing that is required?**

Some nursing homes may still be struggling to get those tests. The new Order states that the State will help support testing as much as it can and will help nursing homes locate other resources to help with testing.

1. **How will the state know nursing homes are planning to do the testing that is required?**

All nursing homes must turn in detailed plans to the state by June 22nd including what labs or hospitals they are working with, how they will handle any residents or staff who refuse to be tested, and if they need help from the state to complete the required testing. Those plans are supposed to be available upon request to the public, too.

1. **When will the homes start acting on their plans to test residents and staff?**

They have to start no later than June 29th unless they have requested help from the state and have not been able to receive it.