

Frequently Asked Questions: Long Term Care & COVID-19

Version date: January 20, 2021

1. Will CMS or the CDC change its guidance for visitation now that people are receiving the vaccine?

On a CDC/CMS Fireside Chat call today, Evan Shulman from CMS indicated that CMS and CDC speak daily about the status of the virus and nursing home visitation guidance. Dr. Amanda Cohn from the CDC indicated that they want to monitor the vaccine's effective in nursing home residents before making any adjustments to visitation guidance. They want to see if when all staff are vaccinated if COVID can still spread to residents. They are starting to collect this data as well as data to determine how effective the vaccine is in older, frail adults.

2. What concerns does CMS have regarding the vaccine and changing visitation guidance?

Evan Shulman with CMS indicated that the vaccine prevents people from getting really sick, but CMS doesn't know if the vaccine will prevent spread of the virus to others. He also stated that CMS hears from residents and their family members on a daily basis. Some residents have stated they would rather die from COVID than live with the visitation restrictions. He indicated that CMS takes visitation very seriously and is balancing the safety of residents with the need for visitation.

3. What percent of residents and staff would need to be vaccinated to change the visitation guidance?

Evan Shulman indicated on today's call that they don't have that number right now. The current nursing home visitation guidance is based on seeing a reduced number of cases to allow for more visitation.

Dr. Cohn added that the CDC would need to see the number of those vaccinated maintained with new resident admissions and staff turnover. She indicated that the number would be no lower than 70% but could be as high as 90%.

4. Can the virus still be transmitted by a person who has been vaccinated?

Dr. Cohn indicated that the risk of transmission is much lower when two people (like a resident and that resident's visitor) are vaccinated. CDC is evaluating the data for people already vaccinated to determine if they can transmit the virus to others. Dr. Cohn added that the CDC is looking for evidence to support shift in the visitation guidance. **She also stated that even if you get vaccinated, you may still be able to transmit the virus.**

5. What if a resident refuses the vaccine? Can the resident be involuntary discharged or be placed in isolation?

Jean Moody-Williams with CMS first confirmed that CMS has no intention to have people take the vaccine if they don't want to but those individuals would need to continue to take precautions to avoid getting the virus. She went on to say that they are not looking to punish but looking for safety for residents.

Evan Shulman did indicate that infection control guidance still applies to nursing homes and it doesn't suggest that a nursing home resident should be discharged. Nursing homes should follow this guidance and CMS should not see concerns around discharge. He went on to say that clinical data may suggest cohorting of vaccinated and non-vaccinated residents.

Dr. Cohn added that physical/social distancing and masks will not go away for some time. Masks will be the last recommendation to be relaxed.

6. How safe is the vaccine?

Dr. Cohn from the CDC indicated that the data shows the vaccine is very effective and safe. The trials included thousands of people from different backgrounds and ethnicity with different medical conditions representing the populations of the US. In particular, she mentioned that African Americans, Latino, and Native Americans were included in this study at a higher rate than in other trials.

7. What else do we know about the trials?

Dr. Cohn reported that the trials included over 30,000 people and started as early as July 2020. Only adults were included in the trial with two participants being in their 90s and many in the 65+ age group were in their early to late 70s.

The participants included people with lots of different underlying conditions and from lots of different racial and ethnic backgrounds.

A week after the two doses were administered, the vaccine was 90-95% effective.

8. How long does the vaccine last?

Dr. Cohn indicated that the CDC knows that the vaccine is good for 3 months with the current data available. In another month, the CDC will be able to determine if the vaccine is effective for 6 months.

9. How does the COVID vaccine compare to other vaccines?

Dr. Cohn stated that the efficacy rate of the COVID vaccine is 90% compared to the influenza vaccine which is about 50-60% effective in what the CDC considers a good year. She went on to say that the COVID vaccine is more like the Shingles vaccine in that it has similar side effects or reactions and it requires two doses.

10. What do we know about the emergency use of the vaccine?

Dr. Cohn explained that the FDA held the approval of the COVID vaccine to the same standards for the number of people in the trial, data collection and review process. The only deviation was the shortened timeframe for review of the people in the trial. Those individuals continue to be monitored and data continues to be collected for trial participants.

11. What about the variance of the COVID virus?

As you may know, there are new variances of the COVID virus with the first case being identified in Michigan this week. On the call today, Dr. Cohn indicated that there is no indication that the vaccine will not be effective on the new variances of the COVID virus but the CDC is still watching the data.