



****COVID-19 HEALTH ALERT****

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Under the authority of Governor Dunleavy's emergency order, the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) is issuing a policy to limit exposure to COVID-19 at long-term care facilities. DHSS is taking this action to protect Alaskans who are at greatest risk for the most severe outcomes of this disease.

"Our elders in nursing homes are particularly vulnerable to this disease and our actions are intended to protect vulnerable adults." said Dr. Anne Zink, Alaska's Chief Medical Officer. "Our desire is to establish a close partnership with long-term care facilities and we're asking families, friends and others who work in and visit these facilities to help us protect the health and safety of our parents, grandparents and other loved ones."

This guidance directs skilled nursing facilities and nursing homes – including those providing memory care – to incorporate the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)'s [minimal to moderate mitigation strategies for long-term care facilities](#) with additional measures, as follows:

- Implement a screening process for anyone entering the facility who is not a resident or staff member. Screening should occur before, or immediately upon, entering the facility.
- Change visitor policies to further limit exposures to residents and staff, including:
 - Limit visitation to essential individuals (e.g., family members and medical providers).
 - Screen all visitors for illness. If visitors have symptoms of respiratory illness/COVID-19 (e.g., fever, cough, shortness of breath) or have had recent travel to an area with known COVID-19 transmission, ask them to use an alternative means to visit with the resident, such as by phone or virtual visits.
 - Post visual alerts (e.g., signs, posters) at the entrance and in strategic places (e.g., waiting areas, elevators, cafeterias) advising visitors not to enter the facility when ill.
 - Require all individuals to wash or sanitize hands at entry.
 - Limit visitor movement in the facility.
 - Keep a detailed log of all visitors and health care personnel (HCP) that includes information about which resident and areas of the facility they visit.
- Limit resident activities that involve community outings and group gatherings.
- Support residents' access to socialization by offering lower-risk opportunities.

In addition:

- Actively monitor absenteeism and respiratory illness among HCP and residents. Follow facility infection control plan for surveillance and tracking of illness within the facility.
- Actively monitor personal protective equipment (PPE) supplies.
- Establish processes to evaluate and test large numbers of patients and HCP with respiratory symptoms (e.g., designated clinic, surge tent).
- Follow [CDC Guidance for Risk Assessment and Public Health Management of Healthcare Personnel with Potential Exposure in a Healthcare Setting to Patients with Coronavirus Disease \(COVID-19\)](#). Work with your Employee Health or Occupational Health Department to evaluate HCP exposure and to determine if work restrictions are needed. If you need additional guidance, contact DHSS Section of Epidemiology at 269-8000.
- Consider staffing contingency plans in anticipation of staffing shortages.