

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Wolf Administration: Long-Term and Congregate Care Restrictions Will Remain in Place to Protect Vulnerable Populations as Pennsylvania Reopens

Harrisburg, PA – The Pennsylvania departments of Health and Human Services issued guidance for [nursing homes](#), [personal care homes](#), and [other long-term and congregate care facilities](#) as counties enter the green phase of the Governor's [Process to Reopen Pennsylvania](#). To further prevent outbreaks within these vulnerable populations, ongoing restrictions in long-term and congregate care facilities will remain in place at least 28 days after the respective facility's county enters the green phase.

"We continue to take a careful, measured approach to ensuring that Pennsylvanians can resume work and normal routines safely – especially in our nursing home facilities across Pennsylvania," Secretary of Health Dr. Levine said. "We need to continue this mitigation effort to make sure that our most vulnerable individuals remain safe. We encourage alternative means of communication for residents to stay in touch with their family, friends, community members, and advocates while we take necessary health and safety precautions."

On March 18, the department issued [guidance](#) for nursing home facilities on COVID-19 mitigation. This guidance required visitor limitations, personnel restrictions, and other measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19 in nursing facilities. This guidance has since been updated on May 12.

"We must remain vigilant and be deliberate about our actions even as we begin to reopen. Green does not mean all clear for anyone, and COVID-19 is still a threat, especially for those who are medically fragile and vulnerable. This virus is not gone, and mitigation efforts are still necessary to keep people safe," said DHS Secretary Teresa Miller. "We understand that for residents of long-term care facilities and their families, these restrictions have been an isolating burden during a difficult time, but our hope is that this careful approach will help these facilities avoid an outbreak and keep residents, staff, and their families safe."

DHS has issued guidance restricting visitation to its licensed intermediate care facilities, assisted living residences as well as DHS' 17 state-run facilities, which include state centers, state hospitals, youth development centers, and youth forestry camps. Individuals served by these facilities often have chronic medical conditions and are at a higher risk of complications from COVID-19, so caution and care must be taken to keep residents and staff at these facilities safe from the virus. Guidance to DHS providers is available [here](#).

DHS has worked with licensed providers and staff at state-run facilities to encourage and facilitate virtual visits and communication to maintain connection between residents

and families while they are unable to be together. Unless otherwise indicated by the individual, the expectation is that communication with family and friends is supported on a regular and routine basis for each individual. Means of safe visitation include:

- Arranging a meeting that occurs between an individual or family/friends viewing each other through a window or glass door, so that social distancing guidelines can be followed.
- Using technology such as FaceTime, Skype, Zoom meetings, Facebook, Messenger, etc.
- Promoting communication through telephone calls, email, writing letters, texting, sending photographs or videos, or the use of virtual assistant technology (ex. Amazon's Alexa or Google Home).

Following the [guidance](#) from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, these restrictions will be among the last restrictions eased to ensure resident health and safety during the COVID-19 pandemic.

To further develop a well-informed, manageable plan that ensures a measured approach for the safe return to activities, visitation, and other events for residents of nursing home facilities, the department is conferring with stakeholders including the state's ombudsman, representatives from skilled nursing care facilities, nursing home associations, other government agencies, and academia. Upon completion of that process, the department will issue guidance that amends the restrictions currently in place.

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Department of Aging Ombudsman has served as a source of encouragement and connection for families who are trying to reach loved ones, because, by the very nature of their personalized advocacy approach, they've been very successful in working with nursing homes to develop connections in accordance with a family's needs and a facility's procedures/capabilities.

Family and friends who are unable to see loved ones living in long-term care facilities because of the COVID-19 emergency may struggle with changes in protocol, rights and policies. The Pennsylvania Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program is available to help with a new statewide resource called [Virtual Family Council](#).

The Ombudsman Program has a ground force of 73 local ombudsmen in communities across Pennsylvania, advocating and empowering on a case-by-case basis for long-term care residents to resolve complaints and issues. The number to call for assistance from a local representative is 717-783-8975.

The Wolf Administration has [taken a three-pillar approach](#) to protecting the vulnerable residents living in long-term living settings from COVID-19:

- Ensuring resident safety through testing, education and resources;
- Preventing and mitigating outbreaks; and

- Working in partnership with state agencies, local health departments and long-term care facility operators.

The Department of Health distributed over 1,812 shipments of personal protective equipment to all long-term care facilities in Pennsylvania. Additionally, the department continues to work with ECRI as they provide technical assistance and our Healthcare Acquired Infection (HAI) team to further assist and remain connected with the nursing homes in order to best assist their needs.

For additional resources regarding COVID-19 and nursing homes in Pennsylvania, please visit the department's [COVID-19 Information for Nursing Homes](#) webpage.

The Wolf Administration stresses the role Pennsylvanians play in helping to reduce the spread of COVID-19:

- Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.
- Cover any coughs or sneezes with your elbow, not your hands.
- Clean surfaces frequently.
- Stay home to avoid spreading COVID-19, especially if you are unwell.
- If you must go out for a life-sustaining reason, please wear a mask.

Updated Coronavirus Links: Press Releases, State Lab Photos, Graphics

- [Daily COVID-19 Report](#)
- [Press releases regarding coronavirus](#)
- [Latest information on the coronavirus](#)
- [Photos of the state's lab in Exton](#) (for download and use)
- [Coronavirus and preparedness graphics](#) (located at the bottom of the page)
- [Community preparedness and procedures materials](#)
- [Map with the number of COVID-19 cases](#)

All Pennsylvania residents are encouraged to sign up for AlertPA, a text notification system for health, weather, and other important alerts like COVID-19 updates from commonwealth agencies. Residents can sign up online at www.ready.pa.gov/BeInformed/Signup-For-Alerts.