

BACKGROUND

To prevent outbreaks of COVID-19 in long-term care facilities, CMS and CDC recommended restricting visitation. ISDH has likewise followed this guidance and, except end-of-life circumstances, has restricted family members and friends from visiting residents in skilled and assisted living facilities. These restrictions, however, are not without consequences. We recognize that isolation has [serious impacts](#) on the health and wellbeing of residents in these facilities. These impacts may be further increased in residents with cognitive deficits. Until now, the focus on keeping individuals connected with families has centered on technology (e.g., video chats), but this does not fully substitute for in-person visits. While congregate settings can amplify the spread of COVID-19, recent data show that transmission risks are lower outdoors. This includes data from a [Japanese study](#) that showed the risk of COVID transmission is 19 times greater indoors compared to outdoors, and a study in [China](#) that showed that of 318 outbreaks, only one was affiliated with outdoor contact.

CONDITIONS OF VISITATION

We believe the risk of COVID transmission in long-term care facilities and the need for family, partner or close friend interactions can be balanced under the following conditions:

County Criteria: Communal spread of COVID in the community must be controlled. This means the county of the facility must have successfully transitioned past the [Indiana Back on Track](#) Stage 2 criteria.

Facility Criteria: Facilities shall meet the following criteria:

- There must be no new COVID cases that originated within the facility, including those involving residents or staff, within the last 14 days. New COVID admissions to a facility would not constitute a facility-onset COVID case.
- A schedule of visitation hours must be established.
- Adequate staff must be present to allow for personnel to help with the outdoor transition of residents, monitoring of visitation, and wiping down visitation areas after each family, partner or friendship visit.
- Resident visitors must be screened for signs and symptoms of COVID.
- Areas where visitors and residents sit must be wiped down between visitations using an approved antiviral disinfectant - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/reopen-guidance.html>
- There must be adequate PPE to permit residents, if they are able to comply, to wear a face mask during visitation.
- Visitors must appropriately wear a face covering at all times.
- Outdoor visitation spaces must allow appropriate social distancing of at least 6 feet between visitors and loved ones.
- Facilities must provide alcohol-based hand rub to families visiting residents and demonstrate how to use it appropriately if necessary.
- Facilities may establish additional guidelines as needed to ensure the safety of visitations and their facility's operations.

Resident Criteria: Resident outdoor visitation should be prioritized for the following:

- Residents must have the ability to safely transition from their room to an outdoor visitation location.
- Residents who have had COVID-19 must no longer require transmission-based precautions as outlined by the [CDC](#).
- Prioritization for visitation should be for residents with diseases that cause progressive cognitive decline (e.g., Alzheimer’s disease) and [residents expressing feelings of loneliness. Loneliness can have deleterious consequences, including increased risk of depression, suicidal thoughts, aggressive behaviors, and anxiety.](#)
- Residents who are able to should wear a face mask during the visitation.

Visitor Criteria: Visitation would be restricted to visitors who meet the following criteria:

- Must wear a face covering or mask during the entire visitation.
- Must use alcohol-based hand rub before and after visitation.
- Must stay in designated facility locations.
- Visitation should be restricted to children 12 years of age or older. Visitors with children must be able to manage them, and children must be able to wear a face mask during the entire visitation. Special family circumstances warranting children under the age of 12 to visit can be approved by individual facilities.
- Must sign in and provide contact information.
- Must not have signs or symptoms of COVID-19; visitors must also attest to their COVID status (testing results) and if they have had COVID-19, they must provide documentation (e.g., doctor’s note) that they no longer meet [CDC criteria](#) for transmission-based precautions.
- Visitors may provide food and beverage to the resident consistent with dietary considerations, but food should not be shared between residents and visitors.

Weather: Visitations should occur only on days when there are no weather warnings that would put either visitors or residents at risk. Furthermore, visitation spaces must provide adequate protection from weather elements (e.g., shaded from the sun).

Any facilities that meet the above criteria would still retain the right to deny outdoor visitation if they believe, 1) circumstances pose a risk of transmitting COVID-19 to the facility, or 2) either the resident or visitors might be at risk of harm.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Additional information and resources for COVID-19 are available at the links below.

- Email strike-teamrequest@isdh.in.gov to request a strike team visit for testing or infection control.
- ISDH COVID-19 webpage: <https://coronavirus.in.gov/2399.htm> under Long-term Care Facilities
- CDC COVID-19 webpage: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/>