What Families and Residents Need to Know About COVID-19 in Long Term Care

Residents of long term care facilities and their families are closely monitoring news of the spread of the COVID-19 virus in nursing homes in China and Washington State. Skilled nursing facilities lie at the intersection of two groups especially vulnerable to the virus—the elderly, and people who live and work in health care facilities. The good news is that there are steps consumers can take to protect themselves and family members in care homes.

**Ask Questions** Government regulators have made clear their expectation that every facility have an emergency plan to deal with possible infections and that facilities and their administrators carefully follow emerging guidance from the Centers for Disease Control on how to prevent spread of the infection. Ask for information about your facility’s plan.

**Keep Tabs** Families and friends of assisted living and long term care residents have a critical role to play in monitoring staffing levels and ensuring that facilities are taking steps to control the potential spread of the virus. If you are concerned that your skilled nursing facility or assisted living facility is not practicing good infection control, let your facility ombudsman know. The ombudsman’s contact information should be displayed in a public place. For a crisis situation in a skilled nursing facility you can call the regional office of the Department of Public Health on this list: [https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CHCQ/LCP/Pages/DistrictOffices.aspx](https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CHCQ/LCP/Pages/DistrictOffices.aspx). For assisted living facilities, you can find regional offices on this list: [https://www.cdss.ca.gov/Portals/9/CCLD/ASC.pdf](https://www.cdss.ca.gov/Portals/9/CCLD/ASC.pdf).

**Keep Clean** Residents of skilled nursing and residential care facilities may be unusually vulnerable to infection because of age or other illnesses, so it is very important that people entering these facilities work hard to avoid bringing the virus with them. They can do this by handwashing and using sanitizers. Every facility should have instructions on hand hygiene at their entrances, and you can also find this information here: [https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/index.html](https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/index.html)

**Visit Safely** Federal and state regulators are urging facilities to screen for guests or staff who have signs of fever or respiratory illness. If you or someone in your household is sick, do not make in-person visits to elderly or ill relatives in assisted living or care homes. It is still very important that friends and family reach out using Skype, FaceTime, email, or old-fashioned phone calls to make sure the needs of loved ones needs are being met.

**You Are Not Alone** The federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services and their counterpart state regulators at the California Department of Public Health and the Department of Social Services are actively urging facilities to take steps to prepare themselves for possible widespread spread of the virus. Each regulator is communicating with facilities to provide guidance on how to keep residents safe.