



State of Connecticut
Department of Aging and Disability Services
Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program
and
Department of Public Health
Office of the Commissioner



November 20, 2020

Dear Resident, Family Member or Responsible Party,

As the holiday season approaches, this is traditionally a time when families travel to see each other and gather in celebration, especially with relatives in long-term care communities. Unfortunately, in response to this pandemic, extreme measures have been and still are required to protect the health and wellbeing of residents in long-term care settings. We understand the toll that isolation caused by visitation restrictions in long-term care communities has taken on our residents. We know that the greatest impact has been to older adults and individuals with preexisting conditions who live in long-term care settings.

As many of you plan for your holiday gatherings, we feel it is important to highlight the current guidance and review the potential risks so that you can make an informed decision. The federal government has directed that nursing homes that are free of positive COVID-19 cases for the previous 14 days be open for in-person visitation with residents. However, our state is currently experiencing higher community-based transmission levels of COVID-19 and this could increase the risk that in-person visitation poses to residents and staff.

The Long-Term Care Ombudsman and the Department of Public Health recognize this is an incredibly difficult time for long-term care residents and family. Throughout this pandemic our long-term care residents have been the most impacted both by the virus and the restrictions necessary to prevent further spread of the virus. Connecticut's long-term care residents remain a priority and our state health officials would like to offer the following considerations when planning celebrations with loved ones who live in long-term care communities.

Examples of ways you can celebrate with your loved one:

- **Low risk:** Celebrate virtually with your loved one using methods such as Skype, FaceTime, WhatsApp, or Google Duo. You can also drop off a meal for them to enjoy.
- **Low-medium risk:** Visit your loved one at their residence. Bring a favorite Thanksgiving food or a holiday treat that meet individualized needs while, following safety guidelines including mask wearing, hand washing, and social distancing. The risk level of a visit to the facility or residence depends on the number of visitors and the potential exposure to COVID-19 that any of the visitors may have had.
- **Medium-high risk:** Bring your loved one home to celebrate with just your household, following safety guidelines including mask wearing, hand washing, social distancing, and frequent cleaning of high touch surfaces. For two weeks prior to your holiday gatherings, limit exposure to COVID-19 by avoiding indoor settings with people you don't live with where you cannot socially

- distance or wear a mask (e.g., indoor social events, restaurants, carpooling). Before removing your loved one, you should understand that they may need to quarantine for 14 days upon their return.
- **Very high risk:** Bring your loved one home to celebrate with multiple households, and/or not following social distancing, handwashing, cleaning, or mask guidance.

Many people living in congregate settings are uniquely vulnerable to COVID-19 and may have health conditions putting them at a higher risk of becoming sick, or even severely ill, with COVID-19. When deciding whether to include your loved one in a holiday gathering, or visiting your loved one in their home, it is important to take into account their health and safety, as well as the health and safety of your loved one's roommates, other people living on their floor or in their home, and the staff that care for them. The above recommendations align with those of the Centers for Medicaid Services who released their holiday guidance on November 19, 2020 and CDC's safe holiday guidance.

Lastly, for loved ones of residents in a long-term care community, it's important to keep yourself and your family safe. In response to the increase in community-based transmission levels of COVID-19, Governor Lamont, in consultation with the Department of Public Health, released guidance earlier this month for all Connecticut residents to follow to best ensure a safe holiday. While any gathering poses some risk, you can reduce the risk of getting or spreading COVID-19 by:

- Conducting pre-party screening for COVID symptoms;
- Wearing a mask whenever possible and having them available for guests, along with hand sanitizer;
- Keeping the guest list small;
- Using disposable items; and
- Maintaining social distancing whenever possible or keeping visits short when social distancing cannot be maintained.

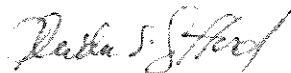
If you have questions related to long-term care, you can contact the Ombudsman Program at: 1-866-388-1888. We also host a Facebook live event on Wednesdays at 5:30 pm. To participate or ask questions, please visit the Connecticut Long Term Care Ombudsman Program's Facebook Page at <https://www.facebook.com/CTLTCOP>.

Sincerely,



Mairead Painter

State Long-Term Care Ombudsman



Deidre Gifford, MD, MPH

Acting Commissioner, Department of Public Health

Commissioner, Department of Social Services