



# Arkansas Department of Health

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4815 West Markham Street • Little Rock, Arkansas 72205-3867 • Telephone (501) 661-2000  
Governor Asa Hutchinson  
José R. Romero, MD, Secretary of Health

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## **Holiday Guidance for Residents of Long-term Care Facilities and Residents' Families and Representatives**

COVID-19 has been difficult for all Arkansans, but it has had a disproportionate impact on the residents living in long-term care facilities. The pandemic has directly impacted the health of those who have contracted the virus, but also indirectly affected all residents through restrictions to visitation that have decreased valuable time spent with family and friends. On June 30, 2020, the Arkansas Department of Health (ADH) issued guidance regarding expanded visitation. This [guidance](#) was updated on October 6, 2020. This holiday guidance does not replace the October 6 guidance, but is instead designed to specifically address family gatherings with residents during the holiday season.

Each year, many families take loved ones who live in long-term care facilities to their homes to celebrate the holidays. Unfortunately, this year the fall and winter holiday seasons coincide with significant increases in community spread of COVID-19. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recently reported that an important driver of the recent case increases is small household gatherings. The [CDC](#) and the ADH recommend that individuals at increased risk of severe illness from COVID-19 should avoid in-person gatherings with individuals with whom they do not live.

***Because individuals living in long-term care facilities fall into the category of increased risk, the ADH strongly recommends against families taking persons who reside in long-term care facilities to their homes or to gatherings for holiday events. This recommendation does not apply to residents who in the last 90 days have been diagnosed with and recovered from COVID-19. However, because immunity is not guaranteed by previous infection, such individuals should abide by all precautions in this guidance and must also meet CDC [criteria for discontinuing transmission-based precautions](#) prior to a home visit.***

Instead of visitations in your home, we recommend visiting with loved ones at the long-term care facility either through outdoor visitation or in those facilities that permit indoor visitation. For families who will have high-risk individuals who reside in long-term care facilities in their homes over the holidays, we recommend taking the following steps to lower the risk of COVID-19 infection.

***Prior to taking your loved one out of the facility, please contact the administration to make sure that a quarantine room would be available on their return. If one is not available, you may be required to keep and care for your loved one until such room becomes available.***

## PLAN AHEAD

Take proactive steps to reduce the risk that anyone in your house, or visiting your house, develops or is exposed to COVID-19.

- **Decrease exposures:** For two weeks prior to your holiday gatherings, avoid indoor settings with people you don't live with where you cannot socially distance or wear a mask (e.g., indoor social events, bars, restaurants, carpooling).
- **Wear a mask:** Wear a cloth mask at all times when you are in indoor locations outside of your house or at outdoor events where you cannot socially distance from others.
- **Wash your hands:** As recommended by the [CDC](#), regularly wash your hands or use hand sanitizer and ask those coming in your house to do the same.
- **Physically distance:** Follow CDC guidelines and socially distance at least 6 feet from others outside your household when possible.

## CREATE A SAFE ENVIRONMENT

Create a safer environment for those visiting you.

- **Screen:** Ask anyone entering or staying in your house if they have had [symptoms](#) (e.g., fever, body aches, fatigue, runny nose, cough) of COVID-19 or if they have had a recent exposure to someone with COVID-19. Anyone in your house with symptoms should be isolated and anyone with exposures should be quarantined. If possible, get yourself and your household tested for COVID-19 in time to receive the results before having high risk individuals in your home.
- **Mask:** When at-risk individuals are visiting, *you should wear a mask while visiting with them inside your house*. In addition, you should wear a mask while in the car with them. If individuals staying with you can also wear a mask, ask them to do so as well.
- **Socially distance:** Set up your house so you can physically distance with individuals who have high-risk health conditions while they are visiting you and during meals or other times when a mask cannot be worn. If possible, have a separate bedroom and bathroom specifically for the long-term care resident. If weather allows, visit outdoors.
- **Wash your hands:** Make sure plenty of hand sanitizer is available and ask all those in your house to use it or to wash their hands regularly as recommended by the CDC.
- **Clean surfaces:** Designate someone to regularly clean high touch surfaces in your house (e.g., tables, doorknobs, light switches, countertops, handles, desks, phones, keyboards, toilets, faucets, sinks, etc.). Make sure you have an approved COVID-19 cleaning solution available and know the appropriate cleaning [procedures](#). Also plan for the safe storage of cleaning solutions to prevent children or those with cognitive deficits from getting into them.
- **Air flow:** Make environmental changes to decrease the indoor spread of COVID-19. This includes cracking windows open, using room HEPA filters and humidifiers, and opening blinds.

## CONTACT THE FACILITY

Long-term care facilities follow strict regulations and guidelines to prevent the entry and spread of COVID-19 in their buildings. Prior to taking someone out of a long-term care facility, make sure you contact the facility administrator and understand the following:

- **Visitation status:** To the extent possible under the October 6 visitation directive, facilities are allowing indoor and outdoor visitation and are planning for families to safely visit over the holidays. Please be aware that visitation may be restricted due to physical limitations of a given facility, weather conditions, and outbreak status in a facility or the surrounding community. Contact the facility administrator to inquire as to the facility's ability to allow visitation and schedule your family visitation.
- **Outbreak status:** If a facility is currently undergoing an outbreak of COVID-19 or currently testing individuals on suspicion of an outbreak, you should understand the risks of exposing yourself and your family to COVID-19 resulting from a home visit. Exposures might affect your ability to visit with friends and family and could affect the ability of the resident to return to the facility in a timely fashion.
- **Quarantining on return:** The CDC currently recommends that all individuals who leave the facility for these types of visits be placed in quarantine for 14 days upon return. Facilities are following this recommendation, which assists in the prevention of transmission of COVID-19 to others, as individuals can unknowingly spread the virus before they develop symptoms or when not symptomatic at all. Most facilities have a designated quarantine area. Depending on the location of the quarantine area in the facility, your loved one might not be able to return to their own room for 14 days. Rather, they would be moved to a room in the quarantine area, if one is available, for 14 days to make sure they do not develop symptoms of COVID-19. Because a home visit is considered a voluntary exposure, a quarantine room might not be available due to prioritizing known significant exposures or if the facility is dealing with an outbreak. If a quarantine room is not available, your loved one may not be able to return to the facility until a room is available.
- **Physician input:** The ADH strongly believes that decisions regarding home visits should be mutually made by the resident, family, facility, and the resident's treating physician. Please contact the facility to discuss your plans for home visits so that the resident's physician and facility may answer any questions that you might have and participate in this process.