



Thanksgiving and Holiday Guidance for Vulnerable Populations

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COVID-19 has been one of our nation's greatest challenges and has especially taken a toll on nursing home residents, individuals with behavioral health challenges and developmental disabilities, direct care workers, and other vulnerable populations. Cases are rising rapidly in Michigan and the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) is committed to ensuring the continued safety of all Michiganders during this challenging time.

We also understand the impact that separation from loved ones has caused. With the holiday season underway, we understand that affected individuals and their families will want to find more ways to spend time together. During the holidays, facilities, residents, and visitors should continue to follow state and federal guidelines for visitation (for additional detail, please consult [DHHS epidemic order](#) and [guidance](#)) and adhere to the core principles of infection prevention, such as remaining six feet or more apart, wearing a face covering, washing hands often and limiting the number of visitors in facilities at any one time. We also recommend that facilities find new ways of celebrating the holidays without having gatherings that could increase the risk of COVID-19 transmission (e.g., virtual parties or visits, provide seasonal music, movies, decorations, etc.).

This guidance is directed to residential care facilities including but not limited to Adult Foster Care Homes, Homes for the Aged, Juvenile Justice Facilities, Child Caring Institutions, hospice facilities, substance use disorder residential facilities, assisted living facilities, and nursing homes. The November 18 [epidemic order](#) issued by MDHHS limited indoor gatherings to no more than two households. This order does not prohibit residents of the facilities above from leaving a care facility; however, it is recommended that:

- **Residents be strongly encouraged to stay in place**, especially in light of increasing prevalence of COVID-19 cases

- Providers and direct care staff educate residents and their family and friends on the associated risk of leaving a care facility and attending gatherings with family and friends as well as the steps they should take to reduce the risk of contracting COVID19
- Providers encourage residents to stay connected with loved ones through alternative means of communication, such as phone and video communication

Care facilities should follow the recommended protocols outlined below to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 if a resident chooses to leave the care facility even after being provided such counseling:

- Limit close contact (maintain physical distancing of six feet or more), adhere to the gathering restrictions in the November 18, 2020 order, and use technology to engage with others remotely.
- Wear a facemask or cloth face covering at all times (including in cars, homes, restaurants, etc.) unless actively eating or drinking, or medical exemptions apply.
- Limit contact with commonly touched surfaces or shared items.
- Keep safe around food and drinks. Avoid communal serving utensils, passing of food, and potluck or buffet style food service, and instead opt for individually prepared plates by a single server.
- Perform hand hygiene often (e.g., wash hands with soap and water or 60% alcohol-based hand sanitizer).
- Avoid large gatherings, crowded areas, and high-risk activities such as singing.
- For those attending a gathering, avoid contact with individuals outside of their household for 14 days prior to the gathering if possible and follow [MDHHS's guidance for safe social gatherings](#).
- Anyone who has signs or symptoms of COVID-19 or has been exposed to someone diagnosed with COVID-19, should not attend gatherings.
- If possible, conduct gatherings outdoors. Indoor gatherings should have good ventilation, open windows, and doors if possible.
- Verbally greet others instead of shaking hands or giving hugs. Think ahead about how you will manage to prevent physical interactions with loved ones of different ages such as young children.

- All residents that leave the care facility should be screened upon return and if symptomatic, the resident should be placed in isolation immediately and their health care provider or the local health department should be contacted for additional guidance
- Strictly adhere to all testing, visitation, and re-entry after visitation requirements for care facilities subject to the [October 21, 2020 Epidemic Order](#) (or any subsequent testing order) or [October 29, 2020 Epidemic Order](#).

Additional nursing facility guidance

In addition to the guidance provided in this document, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services released [guidance to nursing homes](#), residents, and resident family members and representatives. MDHHS encourages review and adherence to this federal guidance as well.

MDHHS also issued an [epidemic order](#) on October 21, outlining requirements for residential care facilities. These requirements remain in effect.



For more information, visit Michigan.gov/Coronavirus.