



# COVID-19 Prevention Protocols Post-Vaccination

*February 19th, 2021*

Many families and friends of loved ones residing in long-term care communities have asked whether there will be changes to COVID-19 policies, in particular visitation, now that residents are fully vaccinated. Since June 3rd, families and friends have been able to visit their loved ones. **You may visit your loved one so long as there have not been any new cases on your loved one's floor or unit for 14 days as outlined in [visitation guidance](#) from the Department of Public Health (DPH).** This policy was recently revised as prior to this change, visitation was not allowed when there were *any* positive cases in the facility. DPH will continue to modify these policies gradually as more communities become fully vaccinated, and as we learn more from the CDC.

It is important to recognize that fully vaccinated individuals can still contract COVID-19 and spread the virus to others. COVID-19 safety protocols have helped contain infections dramatically since last March, and we want to keep infections to a minimum, particularly given recent information that several virus variants could spread rapidly. You can find more information on the current number of COVID-19 cases and deaths in nursing homes and rest homes, referred to as Long-Term Care (LTC) Facilities, on the [DPH Daily Dashboard](#) under "COVID-19 Cases in Long-Term Care (LTC) Facilities."

## **When will I be able to visit my loved one in a long-term care facility?**

You may visit your loved one so long as there have not been any new cases on your loved one's floor or unit for 14 days. As outlined in the [visitation guidance](#) from DPH, facilities must allow residents the opportunity to visit for at least 45 minutes with their loved one; visitation is critically important to a long-term care resident's emotional well-being and quality of life and therefore we encourage you to visit if able. Regardless of the vaccination status of your loved one or those within the facility, it is important to continue to adhere to COVID-19 safety protocols. As we all know, COVID-19 can spread rapidly in LTC. Furthermore, fully vaccinated residents may experience little or no symptoms, and inadvertently transmit the virus to visitors.

## **What else will change in long-term care facilities after residents are vaccinated?**

### **Isolation and quarantine precautions:**

At this point, isolation and quarantine recommendations for staff and residents have not changed, even if the person has received one or two doses of the COVID-19 vaccine. This includes quarantine for staff and residents after an exposure, and residents after admission to the long-term care facility.

### **COVID-19 Testing:**

Testing will continue as currently outlined in DPH guidance, [Long Term Care Surveillance Testing](#), regardless of vaccination status for individual residents or staff in the long-term care facility. This includes weekly testing of all staff, testing of symptomatic staff and residents as well as more extensive outbreak testing of all residents and staff when a new COVID-19 case is identified.

### **Screening:**

Screening residents, staff, and visitors for signs and symptoms of illness will continue as outlined in [DPH guidance](#), even after residents and staff at the facility have been vaccinated. There have been no changes to recommendations for screening for signs and symptoms of COVID-19 in long-term care facilities. No

staff should work with fever or symptoms of acute illness, regardless of whether it is caused by COVID-19 or another illness.

### **Stop the Spread Recommendations for Long Term Care Staff:**

Staff members have played a vital role in caring for loved ones in LTC facilities and further play an important role in protecting the health and wellbeing of residents. Staff continue to take preventative measures such as wearing a mask both at work and in the community, social distancing, and practicing proper hand hygiene regardless of whether they have been vaccinated. These measures protect the staff, their families and others in the community.

### **When will my loved one's facility return to "normal"?**

We know that the past year has been extremely difficult for families, their loved ones and the staff that care for them. While we are entering a promising new phase, we must remain vigilant and continue to follow public health recommendations that can reduce the spread and impact of the virus.

In the months ahead, the Commonwealth will consider changes in recommendations for visitation, testing, screening, personal protective equipment use, and isolation/quarantine, for long-term care facilities after reviewing any future recommendations from the CDC and other national partners. Until that time, long-term care facilities should continue to follow current state and federal guidance.

### **Family Resources and Information**

Additional resources and information for families and loved ones of residents in nursing homes, rest homes, and assisted living facilities can be found at the [Long Term Care COVID-19 Family Information Center](#).

If you have additional questions, the Nursing Home Family Resource Line at 617-660-5399 is available for family members and loved ones of nursing home, rest home, and assisted living residents.

The Nursing Home Family Resource Line is staffed Monday through Friday from 9:00 AM – 5:00 PM. Staff field questions on a range of topics and coordinate across state agencies to help provide answers.