



The Beacon

A Newsletter for Long-Term Care Residents

August 2020

DOH GUIDANCE REGARDING RE-OPENING AND RELAXING COVID-19 RESTRICTIONS

On August 10th, the NJ Department of Health (DOH) released an executive directive that describes what your long-term care facility must do in order to resume in-person visitation and relax some COVID-19 restrictions.

These changes will happen in “phases”, as described below.

- Phase 0 means that nearly all visitation into and within the facility is still restricted. Outdoor visitation is allowed.
- Phase 1 allows communal dining and group activities for COVID-19 negative and asymptomatic or COVID-recovered residents.
- Phase 2 allows communal dining, group activities and indoor visitation (by appointment only), non-medical outings, and non-essential personnel such as hairdressers, etc.
- Phase 3 allows the greatest freedoms, including those in Phase 2, plus regular indoor visitation and volunteers.

All long-term care facilities start at Phase 0. In order to move to Phase 1, 2 or 3, your long-term care facility must inform the NJ Department of Health that the facility has not had a COVID-19 case for 28 days.

In addition, your facility must attest that they have adequate testing capacity and a stockpile of personal protection equipment. They must also develop an outbreak plan that includes a back-up staffing and communications plan. And they must hire or contract with an infectious disease control specialist or consultant.

LIMITED VISITS ALLOWED

During all of these phases (0-3), residents in some circumstances can receive “compassionate care” visits and/or “essential caregiver” visits indoors.

“Compassionate care” visits are permitted if a resident recently moved in and is struggling to adjust, has lost a close family member, or if the resident’s condition has seriously declined.

Similarly, there is now an exception for “essential caregiver” visits by family, friends or other support persons. Specifically, the directive states that “an essential caregiver could be an individual who was previously actively engaged with the resident OR is committed to providing assistance with activities of daily living.”

If you think you or other residents may qualify for “compassionate care” or “essential caregiver” visits, talk to your social worker. Your facility probably has already developed a policy to accommodate these types of visits.

VOTING IN NOVEMBER

The November 3rd Presidential Election is approaching and it's time to make sure you are registered and ready to vote! Voting is your Constitutional right and also one of the important nursing home resident rights enshrined in federal and state law.

Due to COVID-19, in-person voting will be more challenging for residents of long-term care this year. There will be fewer polling sites and there may still be restrictions on residents leaving the facility for non-medical reasons. And, as you may have seen in the news, there are currently U.S. Postal Service problems and delays around the United States. In response, Governor Murphy recently issued an Executive Order requiring that every registered NJ voter receive a mail-in ballot in advance of the election. You do not need to request it; it should be mailed automatically to you. We suggest that you complete your ballot and mail it in (or have a designated person deliver it) well in advance of the November 3rd election to avoid any problems.

If you are unsure if or where you are registered, you can check here: <https://voter.svrs.nj.gov/registration-check> or have a friend, family member, or social worker help you. If you are not currently registered, you can find a voter registration form for your county here:

<https://www.state.nj.us/state/elections/voter-registration.shtml>.

You must mail in your registration form by October 13th to be eligible to vote.

Please ask the facility staff how they plan to help facilitate voting this year. Staff can help you check your registration status, print and mail forms, contact election officials, and help you access information about candidates and any ballot initiatives. Voting is your fundamental right and the long-term care facility must respect and honor it.

We will revisit this issue in the September issue of the newsletter with more detailed information and any changes or updates to the NJ voting process for 2020.



The purpose of this newsletter is to keep you up-to-date with important information. If you have a topic you want us to cover in a future issue, please call us or email us at outreach@ltco.nj.gov with your idea.

New Jersey Office of the Long-Term Care Ombudsman
www.NJ.GOV/LTCO Laurie Brewer, LTC Ombudsman

FOLLOW US     

