



## Department of Health

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Commissioner

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Executive Deputy Commissioner

April 19, 2020

DAL: C20-01  
SUBJECT: Guidance for Resident and Family  
Communication in Adult Care Facilities and  
Nursing Homes

Dear Administrator:

The New York State Department of Health recognizes that COVID-19 has presented unique challenges and has created a need for adult care facilities and nursing homes to develop innovative ways to keep residents connected to their families and communities. Keeping residents connected will not only continue to promote and enhance quality of life during these uncertain times but will also address feelings of social isolation and loneliness that many of our State's adult care facility and nursing home residents may be experiencing.

As indicated in State regulations, the facility must continue to meet the psychosocial needs of all residents, including emotional and physical well-being, self-determination, self-respect and dignity.

Governor Cuomo recently signed two Executive Orders in relation to communication with family members. Executive Order 202.18 provides that any skilled nursing facility, nursing home, or adult care facility licensed and regulated by the Commissioner of Health shall notify family members or next of kin for all residents if any resident tests positive for COVID-19, or if any resident suffers a COVID-19 related death, within 24 hours of such positive test result or death. Financial penalties may be assessed for violations, pursuant to Executive Order 202.19.

The Department encourages all facilities to consider implementing some of the best practices that are currently in place in some of New York's adult care facilities and nursing homes.

### **Best Practices and Ways to Keep Residents and Families Engaged During the COVID-19 Pandemic**

- Develop a face-to-face video call program
- Develop a family call program where activities or social work staff call families regularly with clinical updates, depending on the resident's condition
- Establish an ambassador program that makes support staff available to answer phones and connect family members to nursing staff
- Hold weekly webcasts from the leadership to answer live questions from families

- Provide daily updates from the leadership of the facility on the facility's web page
- Modify the facility's web page to include COVID-19 information and communication resources
- Establish a bereavement support group for families of deceased residents
- Provide written communication via email and US Mail with regular updates surrounding the facility's COVID-19 response plan
- Arrange through-window calls or visits
- Invite families to attend care plan meetings via telephone
- Establish a pen pal program with the outside community
- Continue to hold resident council meetings by modifying how they are conducted to maintain social distancing
- Direct social work staff to speak with each unit daily to identify any COVID-19 response issues with either residents or staff
- Maintain regular administrator rounds and post regular updates from the administrator using the facility's social media outlets.
- Conduct phone conferences featuring the facility Medical Director or other key staff to provide information on COVID-19 and to answer questions from families
- Increase activity staffing hours for more in-room activities

### **Additional Ideas to Connect Families and Adult Care Facility and Nursing Home Residents During the COVID-19 Pandemic**

- Ask families to send care packages that include a note and a photo of sender to be used as a memory prompt
- Ask families to send video messages that can be replayed.
- Have families load an electronic picture frame (or other device) with family photos for a loved one who cannot receive visitors
- Create a virtual adopt-a-grandparent program where community members can virtually "adopt" a resident to either write letters, speak on the phone, or have virtual visits if the facility is able to coordinate
- Partner with a local educational institution to ask kids and families at home to make greeting cards for residents

- Consider holding weekly virtual family council meetings to allow families to connect with the nursing home's administration to address unique issues that may have arisen due to the COVID-19 crisis.

Facilities should keep the lines of communication with residents and families open to the best of their abilities. The Department strongly encourages all adult care facilities and nursing homes to develop a process to keep information accessible and available. For more information contact [covidadultcareinfo@health.ny.gov](mailto:covidadultcareinfo@health.ny.gov) or [covidnursinghomeinfo@health.ny.gov](mailto:covidnursinghomeinfo@health.ny.gov).

Sincerely,

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