



PENDULUM

Coronavirus (COVID-19) Frequently Asked Questions

As a risk management company, [Pendulum](#) is committed to our clients; as such, we are providing the following answers to frequently asked questions about Coronavirus (COVID-19). *COVID-19 is a rapidly evolving virus; although this information was current upon publication (updated March 11, 2021), we urge you to utilize the links in this document for the most recent information on the virus.*

What are the symptoms of COVID-19 and how is it spread?

The [symptoms](#) of COVID-19 can include the following: fever, cough, shortness of breath, chills, muscle pain, sore throat, a new loss of taste or smell, nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea. Symptoms can range from mild to severe and appear two to 14 days after exposure to the virus. Although research on how the virus is spread is still ongoing, it is thought to be [spread](#) mainly through close contact from person-to-person, but recent research has found that airborne transmission can sometimes spread the virus as well.

What if a resident has these symptoms?

The Center for Disease Control (CDC) has issued a guidance on [responding to COVID-19 in nursing homes](#). Medical care should be sought immediately if a resident (or staff member) has emergency warning signs of COVID-19: trouble breathing, persistent pain or pressure in the chest, new confusion, inability to wake or stay awake, or bluish lips or face. If a resident is suspected or known to have the virus, they need to be isolated. The CDC's information on preparing for COVID-19 in nursing homes can be found [here](#).

Should visitors be restricted?

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) released a revision to their [Nursing Home Visitation guidance on March 10, 2021](#). This guidance significantly relaxes previous visitation guidelines regarding visitors. A CMS [press release](#) states that high vaccination rates among nursing home residents, and nursing home staff adhering to infection control protocols, have helped significantly reduce COVID-19 positivity rates and the risk of transmission in nursing homes. A CMS [fact sheet](#) provides an overview of the guidance including indoor visitation, indoor visitation during an outbreak, compassionate care visits, and ombudsman visits. The fact sheet also notes that vaccines are recommended for visitors but not required.

What other restrictions are in place?

Implementing active screening of residents and healthcare personnel for fever and respiratory systems, performing frequent hand hygiene for staff and residents, and reminding residents to practice social distancing and wear masks when in common areas should continue even with the relaxation of the above guidelines.

What other actions should be considered to promote communications with family members?

Because of the need to implement social distancing and keep families informed on COVID-19 related events in the facility, actions need to be taken to maximize communication with family members. This may include newsletters; conference calls with updates and question and answer sessions, including facility COVID-19 positive status; prompt individual calls to family members about changes in resident condition; etc.

How should staff be monitored?

All staff should be asked to regularly monitor themselves for fever and symptoms of respiratory infection. If staff are ill, remind them to stay home. The CDC has a [self-checker guide](#) to help an individual make decisions and seek appropriate medical care. If staff develop signs and symptoms of a respiratory infection while on the job, they should immediately stop working, put on a facemask, and self-isolate at home. The employee should contact their doctor and follow their recommendations for next steps. All staff should be screened at the beginning of their shift for fever and respiratory symptoms. Staff that work at multiple facilities should also be identified and actively screened. The CDC continues to update their guidance for healthcare personnel [here](#).

What about transferring residents or accepting residents with COVID-19?

If a resident needs a higher level of care, the current facility needs to alert the receiving facility and emergency medical services (EMS) to the resident's diagnosis and take all precautions, including placing a facemask on the resident during transfer. If a resident is accepted with the virus, the resident needs to be isolated and monitored [within the facility](#). Consider locating new admissions to a wing or area separate from other facility residents for a 14-day period to assess for COVID-19.

How should a facility respond to family members about their preparedness?

The facility should be able to state what precautions they are taking to avoid COVID-19 on their premises and show that measures are being put into action. It is important to document environmental controls being employed, including the date these controls were completed. Transparency is key in high-stress situations such as this: consider adding signage at the front entrance stating what precautions the facility is taking in reaction to COVID-19, send [letters](#) to families outlining what actions are being taken in your facility, get literature from your local health department to send to families, and print out [resources](#) from the CDC on COVID-19.

What environmental controls need to be taken?

You are urged to review the CDC recommendations for [infection control](#) and frequently asked questions on [infection prevention and control](#), as well as [personal protective equipment](#) which should be accessible to all staff. Alcohol-based hand sanitizer (with greater than 60% ethanol or 70% isopropanol) should be available and accessible to everyone. Utilize signage for infection prevention—topics may cover hand hygiene and cough etiquette, among others. Make sure steps are taken to [clean and disinfect](#) after persons suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19 have been in the facility. Print out and post the CDC's "Stop the Spread of Germs" [poster](#).

How does a facility minimize the spread of respiratory disease?

The CDC recommends that facilities follow their normal infection control practices as the first line of defense against COVID-19. Additionally, a facility should review the CDC's [everyday preventive actions](#) to prevent the spread of respiratory disease. The CDC also has an [infection prevention and control assessment tool](#) for nursing homes preparing for COVID-19 (this tool may also contain content relevant for assisted living facilities). Staff assigned to provide care to COVID-19 positive residents should not be assigned to non-COVID-19 positive residents on that day. [Facility-wide testing](#) should also be considered following the CDC's [testing guidelines](#). CMS has issued a [memo](#) for testing requirements as well. The CDC also has considerations for preventing the spread of the virus in [assisted living facilities](#).

What about retirement communities and independent living facilities?

The CDC has issued a [guidance](#) for these communities and facilities as well. The [FAQs](#) for administrators cover planning and preparedness and what to do if there is a COVID-19 case or symptomatic resident or staff member.

What kind of training is available?

CMS' online learning platform, the [Quality, Safety & Education Portal \(QSEP\)](#), provides [targeted COVID-19 training for nursing homes](#). CMS outlined the training in a [November press release](#) and also publishes a list of nursing homes at which [50 percent or more of staff have completed the COVID-19 training](#). CMS also provides a [nursing home training self-assessment](#) through the Hospital Quality Improvement Contractors to assess an organization's training needs.

How has COVID-19 affected state surveys?

State surveys began to resume regular survey activities in November 2020. The newly revised [visitation guideline](#) specifically states that surveyors are not required to be vaccinated but should adhere to the core principles of COVID-19 infection prevention and any requirements set by state law. CMS continues to update the [Toolkit on State Actions to Mitigate COVID-19 Prevalence in Nursing Homes](#) with information, guidance, and programs to mitigate COVID-19 in facilities.

What can each of us do to protect ourselves and others?

The best way to prevent illness is to avoid being exposed to the virus, but everyone can take steps to slow the spread at work and at home and [protect themselves and others](#). [Social distance](#), [wear a mask](#) or [PPE](#), [wash your hands](#), and [routinely clean and disinfect your home](#). It is also important for all of us to take care of our [emotional health](#) during a stressful time such as a pandemic.

How do facilities need to prepare differently for natural disasters and severe weather because of COVID-19?

The CDC has information on how to [plan and prepare for natural disasters and severe weather](#) in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

With flu season here, how should a facility prepare?

The facility should prepare for flu as it always does, knowing that getting a flu vaccine for those residents who can receive it will be more important than ever. Facility staff of all levels should also receive the flu vaccine. The CDC has recently updated their [FAQs about the 2020–2021](#) flu season.

What about a vaccine?

On December 11, 2020, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issued the first emergency use authorization (EUA) for the [Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine](#) to be distributed in the United States; this was followed on December 18, 2020 with an issuance of an EUA for the [Moderna COVID-19 Vaccine](#). On February 27, 2021, the EUA for the [Janssen COVID-19 Vaccine \(Johnson & Johnson\)](#) was issued. Briefing documents are available by the FDA for the [Pfizer-BioNTech](#), [Moderna](#), and [Janssen \(Johnson & Johnson\)](#) vaccines. The FDA has also released fact sheets for the vaccines for healthcare providers administering the vaccine ([Pfizer-BioNTech](#); [Moderna](#); [Janssen \[Johnson & Johnson\]](#)) and fact sheets for recipients and caregivers ([Pfizer-BioNTech](#); [Moderna](#); [Janssen \[Johnson & Johnson\]](#)).

The [Department of Health and Human Services \(HHS\)](#) has detailed information on authorized vaccines and how they will be distributed.

The CDC recommends that [residents of long term care facilities](#) be included among those offered the first supply of COVID-19 vaccines. The CDC has released "[Key Things to Know About COVID-19 Vaccines](#)" to provide information about the vaccine program. The Center's [vaccine information](#) also includes information about the [safety of COVID-19 vaccines](#) and some [commonly asked questions](#) about vaccine planning, development, safety, and getting vaccinated.

Vaccine roll-out programs vary by state. WebMD has a listing by state of their online [COVID-19 vaccine information](#). NBC News' [Plan Your Vaccine](#) site includes information about getting a COVID-19 vaccination as the rollout extends across the country.

Our staff and residents have been vaccinated. Now what?

In addition to the recently updated CMS visitation guidance (see [Should Visitors be Restricted](#), above), the CDC has issued an [initial guidance for people who have been fully vaccinated](#). They have also released [interim public health recommendations for fully vaccinated people](#) and a [science brief](#) on the recommendations for fully vaccinated people.

How are COVID-19 cases and data tracked?

Besides your state health department website, the CDC's [COVID Data Tracker](#) provides maps and charts to help visualize data; the site also identifies [Elder Care events](#) throughout the country. The [Mayo Clinic](#) tracks hot spots, cases, and trends in the country.

Risk Management

Pendulum is offering free access to the [Pendulum Risk Management Resource Center for Senior Housing](#). This online portal offers COVID-19 resources in addition to tools, information, articles, and more covering risk management in aging services. Simply click [here](#) to register. Please note on the registration form that you learned about the website from the Pendulum COVID-19 FAQ document. You will receive an email once your registration is approved. (If you are already a subscriber to another "Resources for Risk" resource center, you have access to the resources mentioned above.)

Important Links

Below are links to take you to the most up-to-date COVID-19 information available.

- [American Health Care Association \(AHCA\)](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#)
- [Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services \(CMS\)](#)
- [CMS Nursing Home Resource Center, Provider and Partners, COVID-19 Data and Updates](#)
- [CoronaVirus.gov](#)
- [John Hopkins University Coronavirus Resource Center](#)
- [LeadingAge](#)
- [National Institutes of Health \(NIH\)](#)
- [Occupational Safety and Health Administration \(OSHA\)](#)
- [Public Health Emergency](#)
- [Quality Improvement Organizations COVID-19 Resources](#)
- [USAFacts](#)
- [U.S. Food and Drug Administration \(FDA\)](#)
- [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#)

About Pendulum

[Pendulum](#) is a full-service risk management company that offers risk control services to insurance carriers and healthcare entities throughout the country. Pendulum's mission is to "help our clients reduce professional liability exposure by balancing risk and defensibility."

