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**MEMO**

COVID-19, Visitation and Long-Term Care Communities  
**Revised April 14, 2020**

The COVID-19 virus and the resulting public health emergency has all of us needing to modify almost every aspect of our daily lives, regardless of where we live. In order to try to slow the spread of COVID-19, the fullest cooperation of all residents of long-term care settings, their families and friends is essential at this critical point. This Memo reflects our recommendations only.

It is possible that people can pass the virus before they show any symptoms of being sick. When you go out into the community and interact with others, you have no way of knowing whether they may be sick.<sup>1</sup>

People who live in our nursing homes, assisted living communities and the staff and caregivers are at highest risk. When a COVID-19 case occurs in a long-term care setting, the potential for rapid spread can be extremely high and life-threatening.

Given the growing public health emergency, we are recommending the following, effective immediately:

- Follow the Governor's Emergency Order #12, "Safer at Home," and do not leave your long-term care community or your home for anything but essential needs, such as getting groceries and picking up medications. If you are over age 65 or have a chronic health condition, please ask if another person can manage these tasks for you to minimize your time out of your home.<sup>2</sup>
- If you are a resident, please stay where you are. When you go into the community you run an increasingly high risk of bringing COVID-19 back into your long-term care home with you, potentially infecting other vulnerable residents and staff.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/faq.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/older-adults.html>

Here are some suggestions to help us get through this safely and in the healthiest way possible, while still trying to visit in some format:

- If your family member living in a long-term care setting is at end-of-life, you may be able to visit by exception. You will be asked to work with the nursing home or assisted living home to call ahead and ask to visit, you will be screened to make sure visitors do not have symptoms (runny nose, fever, cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, exposure to a COVID-19 case). You will be escorted to your family member's room or other location designated by the home. You are asked to not go anywhere else in the building or visit with any other resident or staff. You are also asked to be extra careful about washing your hands or using hand sanitizer and limiting surfaces touched when you enter the resident's room and when you leave.

Some alternatives to a face to face visit might include:

- Use Facetime, Skype or other mobile media, if your resident has access to a device, or as arranged by the home.
- Send extra cards, notes, postcards, being sure to keep your message short and positive.
- Phone your resident often, but please try not to call during the busiest times of day if staff need to assist your resident with the phone.
- If your resident is unable to talk on the phone or use mobile media to stay in touch, ask the staff if someone can call you periodically to give you an update about how your resident is doing.

These recommendations are to keep our residents of Wisconsin nursing homes and assisted living communities protected from the COVID-19 virus, but also the staff and caregivers who work in those settings. In these days where many long-term care settings are already working with fewer staff than they would like, they cannot afford to lose even one to this virus for any length of time.

Residents still have the right to access the Ombudsman Program with the Board on Aging and Long Term Care. Do not hesitate to contact us with questions or concerns. We can be reached by phone at 1-800-815-0015, via e-mail at [BOALTC@wisconsin.gov](mailto:BOALTC@wisconsin.gov) or online at <http://longtermcare.wi.gov/>

For more information please visit:

Governor Ever's Emergency Order #12 Safer at Home  
<https://evers.wi.gov/Documents/COVID19/EMO12-SaferAtHome.pdf>

Department of Health Services Division of Public Health Memo 2020-16  
<https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/dph/memos/communicable-diseases/2020-16.pdf>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): Running Essential Errands  
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/essential-goods-services.html>

Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services Memo QSO-20-14-NH (revised)

<https://www.cms.gov/files/document/3-13-2020-nursing-home-guidance-covid-19.pdf>

Wisconsin Department of Health Services

<https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/>