



November 19, 2020

## DHEC Guidelines for Residents Leaving Long Term Care Facilities for Holidays

The Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) strongly recommends that licensed community residential care facilities and nursing homes in South Carolina establish a policy addressing leave of absence for residents during the holidays. This leave of absence policy should clearly outline the following:

- Expectations of residents while away from the facility (e.g., encouraging mask wearing, performing hand hygiene, social distancing, etc.)
- Expectations once residents return to the facility (e.g., testing, hand hygiene, etc.)
- Isolation (private room/designated wing or unit)
- Length of isolation
- Monitoring for signs/symptoms
- Infection control and prevention practices
  - Screening all visitors for symptoms of COVID-19
  - Practicing social distancing
  - Performing hand hygiene (e.g., use alcohol-based hand rub upon entry)

**DHEC strongly discourages families from taking persons who reside in long-term care facilities to their family homes or to social gatherings for holiday events.** This recommendation does not apply to residents who have been diagnosed with and recovered from COVID-19 in the last 90 days. However, such individual must meet the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) criteria for discontinuing transmission-based precautions.

**Instead of visitations in family homes, we recommend visiting with loved ones at the long-term care facility that they reside in by adhering to [DHEC's outdoor and indoor visitation guidelines](#).** Facilities should also encourage virtual communications in lieu of visitation and provide both residents and their families the resources to conduct such visits.

DHEC offers the following instructions for facilities regarding leave of absence policies:

### Prior to Resident Leaving the Facility

- Residents should only be allowed to leave when it is within the scope of the facility's licensure and policy, provided that the resident does not show any COVID-19 signs of infection or symptoms, and has not had a known exposure within 14 days of their outing.
- Overnight stays are highly discouraged.

- The resident should be functionally cognizant to follow infection control and social distancing guidance.

### **Quarantining Upon Return to Facility**

- Families should contact the facility to make sure that an observation room would be available upon the resident's return. If one is not available, then families may be required to keep and care for the resident until a room becomes available.
- The facility needs to be prepared for quarantine and have the capacity to quarantine for 14 days once residents return. This includes having a private room for each returning resident, preferably with a private bathroom.
- Residents must be quarantined upon return. The CDC currently recommends that all individuals who leave the facility for these types of visits be placed in quarantine for 14 days when returning. If the resident lives in a private residence or room, then this means that they would be separated from others in the facility for 14 days upon return. If the resident has a roommate, then this means that the resident might not be able to return to their own room for 14 days upon return. Rather, the resident should be moved to an observation room if one is available for 14 days to monitor that they do not develop any signs or symptoms of COVID-19. If an observation room is not available, then the resident may not be able to return to the facility until a room is available.

### **Testing After Returning to Facility**

- Residents must be tested upon return. Residents who leave the facility for the holidays should be tested no earlier than 7 days after returning to the facility.

**NOTE: A negative test result does NOT change the quarantine period.**

- Testing should continue as per the CDC guidance and CMS requirements for testing. Residents should also be tested upon the identification of COVID-19 signs and symptoms, and again at the onset of any outbreak at the facility.

Facilities can contact [ACC-HealthReg@dhec.sc.gov](mailto:ACC-HealthReg@dhec.sc.gov) with any questions at all regarding visitation.