



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Health and Human Services
Department of Public Health
Bureau of Health Care Safety and Quality
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TO: Fire Chiefs
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FROM: Elizabeth Daake Kelley, MPH, MBA, Director
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SUBJECT: Nursing Home FAQs for First Responders & Municipalities

DATE: April 6, 2020

1) How do nursing homes ensure health care workers aren't transmitting COVID-19 to residents?

Staff and other healthcare workers have their temperature taken before each shift and are asked about any COVID-19 like symptoms. If they do have a temperature or any symptoms, then they are not allowed to report to work. If a staff member tests positive for COVID-19, they are directed to isolate at home.

All staff at the nursing home wear masks at all times to reduce the likelihood of transmission.

2) Do first responders and EMS personnel need to be screened before entering a nursing home?

Every individual regardless of reason entering a nursing home (including residents, staff, outside healthcare workers, vendors, etc.) should be asked about COVID-19 symptoms and they must also have their temperature checked. An exception to this is EMS personnel or first responders responding to an urgent medical need or other emergency. They do not have to be screened as they should respond as quickly as possible.

3) Are people able to visit their family members in a nursing home?

Due to the COVID-19 emergency, the Department of Public Health has temporarily restricted all visitors from nursing facilities for the health and safety of the residents. This restriction will be in place as long as the State of Emergency is in place.

4) Why are we seeing so many cases of COVID-19 in nursing homes?

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) stated that nursing homes have become an accelerator for the virus because residents, who are generally vulnerable to complications from the virus, are even more so in an enclosed environment like a nursing home. COVID-19 is highly transmittable. As an example, in one Maryland nursing home, COVID-19 cases grew from one confirmed case one day to 64 confirmed cases the next. Similar outbreaks are happening across the country.

5) What steps do nursing homes take when there are cases of COVID-19 in my local nursing home?

Nursing homes are required to report cases of COVID-19 to the Department of Public Health as well as their local board of health. When they report this information to DPH, the facility is assigned a dedicated epidemiologist and nurse that will provide them with help to make sure that they put in the proper infection control protocols to mitigate the spread of the virus.

Nursing homes are also directed to isolate residents who test positive for COVID-19 to protect other residents.

6) Why are COVID-19 nursing homes being created?

Having designated skilled nursing facilities helps prevent a situation where patients with COVID-19 infection are discharged from the hospital to a nursing home that would have to care for both infected and non-infected residents. It also ensures that hospitals are able to quickly discharge patients who might not be ready to return home and need additional help so that they can dedicate their resources to the sickest patients.

7) How do first responders know if there are residents with COVID-19 in a nursing home?

Nursing homes are directed to inform the local board of health if any residents are confirmed to be infected with COVID-19.

First responders and EMS personnel entering a nursing home should assume that a resident may have COVID-19 and so don the appropriate personal protective equipment.

8) How does my local nursing home request testing for its residents?

Your local nurse home can request testing for its residents in one of two ways:

- If the nursing home has health care personnel who are able to perform the testing then they should call the DPH epidemiology line at **617-983-6800** and the test kits will be sent to the home.
- If the nursing home needs assistance in performing the specimen collection then the home should call the National Guard testing hotline at **339-202-3720** and the National Guard will come to the home to test the residents.

9) There are community concerns about the safety and quality of care in my local nursing home, what entity is monitoring these facilities? How do my residents report such issues?

In Massachusetts nursing homes and rest homes are licensed by the Department of Public Health. Each nursing home is surveyed on average once per year and when there are complaints that raise concern about compliance with care regulations. Assisted Living Residences are certified by the Executive Office of Elder Affairs.

If you or one of your residents have a concern about your local nursing home, rest home or assisted living residence then you should call the Nursing Facility Resource Line at **617-660-5399**.

Please visit DPH's website that provides up-to-date information on COVID-19 in Massachusetts: <https://www.mass.gov/2019coronavirus>.