



Topic: Holiday Visitation Guidance for Licensed Community Residential Settings

The 2020 holiday season is upon us and, unfortunately, New Jersey is experiencing increases in COVID-19 positivity across the State. Many individuals, families and friends are inquiring about visitation for those who reside in licensed community residential settings during this time.

The Department of Human Services' Division of Developmental Disabilities (Division) supports an individual's right to engage with family and friends in visitation outside of the licensed community residential setting they call home, but is asking everyone to work together to help reduce the spread of COVID-19.

The virus that causes COVID-19 is easily transmitted, especially in group settings. Many residents of licensed community residential settings have underlying health conditions that make them particularly vulnerable to suffering the most serious complications of COVID-19 infection, including death. Additionally, those individuals who do not have underlying health conditions often reside with housemates or work with staff who do and who may un-intentionally expose them to the virus.

Therefore, the Division strongly recommends against individuals and the staff that support them from engaging in in-person holiday celebrations and gatherings with those they do not live with.

It is understood that, as a result of COVID-related restrictions, many individuals, families and friends feel disconnected from one another, and the absence of those we care about during this cherished time of year does not make that any easier. In recognition of that, the Division is directing all residential service providers to provide as many opportunities as possible for visitation that adheres to [Guidance for Residential Providers on Visits with Family and Friends](#).

For those who weigh the benefit of visitation outside of a licensed community residential setting with those they do not live against the possible negative outcomes that can be severe, the following guidance is issued:

1. **The Department of Human Services and the Division strongly recommends against individuals and the staff that support them from engaging in in-person holiday celebrations and gatherings with those they do not live with.** The CDC has [reported](#) that a significant driver of the recent increase in cases is small family gatherings. The [CDC](#) and [NJDOH](#) recommend that individuals at increased risk of severe illness from COVID-19 avoid in-person gatherings with individuals with whom they do not live with.
2. Instead of visits with family and friends off-site of a licensed community residential setting, the Division recommends visitation outdoors, or possibly indoors so long as it is permitted per existing standards. Telephone and video conferencing visits are also an option. For more information

please review [Guidance for Residential Providers on Visits with Family and Friends](#).

3. Families and friends who elect to take an individual off-site of a licensed community residential setting must contact and make arrangements with the residential provider. Any individual who attends an off-site celebration or gathering must be quarantined upon their return in accordance with CDC guidance as follows:
 - a. The individual must be quarantined for 14 days upon return to the licensed community residential setting;
 - b. If the individual resides in their own private residence not shared by another individual or lives in a residence with others but does not share a bedroom, they may be quarantined there. However, they should still be separated from other residents and not interact with them for 14 days. The capacity of an individual to comply with this must be considered;
 - c. If the individual has a bedroom shared with one or more individuals, they should be quarantined in an alternate location away from others for 14 days upon their return. Please note that this may not be possible in all instances;
 - d. If another location is not available, the licensed community residential provider shall notify the family that the individual will not be able to return to the program until an alternate location to quarantine for 14 days becomes available. All efforts shall be made to provide a timeframe in which another quarantine location may be available. In some cases, the residential agency may not be able to provide a realistic alternate location;
 - e. **Licensed community residential settings should develop and implement a plan, in preparation for the return of residents whose family or friends who engage in holiday visits/gatherings, that includes the following:**
 - i. Based on available space, estimate how many residents can be isolated for 14 days in their own unshared bedroom or alternate location from November 25, 2020 through January 1, 2021. Consider PPE, available staffing and the ability of the individual to cooperate with isolation.
 1. If an unshared bedroom or alternate space is absolutely not possible to provide for quarantine, this shall be communicated to the individual and the family/friend requesting the visit. At no time shall an individual be barred from participating in a holiday event or gathering. However, restrictions that may exist on readmission shall be communicated so that an informed decision can be made by those involved.
 - ii. Establish a sign-up process for residents and families to make reservations before taking the individual off-site of the licensed community residential setting. Reservations should be available up to the number of individuals for whom quarantine can be accommodated for 14 days upon return. The individual/family/friend will be required to provide specific dates, including the number of hours if less than a day or the number of days requested to be off-site. This must be confirmed at least 36 hours before the off-site visit is to take place.
 - iii. Create a waiting list for those who request a reservation after the established limit has been reached. Individuals who leave without a reservation or who are on a waiting list may not be guaranteed readmission to the location at the end of their scheduled off-site visit. Individuals/families/friends shall be informed of this before taking the individual off-site.
 - iv. Require 36 hours'-notice of cancellation/change in plans before an individual is taken off-site.

- v. Require the individual/family to certify that:
 - 1. They are aware of the possible dangers of exposure to COVID-19 for the individual/family/friend and those the individual resides with;
 - 2. They will follow masking, social distancing and hand hygiene practices pursuant to CDC and NJDOH directives during the off-site visit; and
 - 3. They will notify the licensed community residential setting if anyone present at the holiday celebration and/or gathering tests positive for COVID-19 or exhibits symptoms within 14 days of the off-site visit.
- vi. The licensed community residential settings should obtain a signed certification from the individual and their family member and/or friend taking them off-site memorializing the above. If the individual is unable to consent then consent from their guardian is required. A copy of the certification shall be provided to the individual/family/friend and maintained by the residential agency.
- f. Prior to taking the individual off-site, family members and/or friends picking them up should contact the licensed community residential provider to make sure that they are able to quarantine the individual upon return on the established date. Family members and/or friends may be required to care for the individual until there is room for them to be quarantined. Families/friends must plan for this and be prepared to provide the care for the length of time it may be needed.