



COVID-19 Response
Date: March 15, 2021

Topic: Guidance for Residential Providers on Visits with Family and Friends

Effective Date: As early as March 19, 2021 and supersedes November and July 2020 guidance

Indoor and outdoor visits must continue to be offered by residential providers, including residential programs for persons with Traumatic Brain Injury, when certain criteria are met. In either visit type, social distancing and use of personal protective equipment (PPE) are still required.

Visits of any kind shall only be permitted so long as the Department of Human Services and State health officials agree that it is safe to do so. Modification of current policy is based on recommendations by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)¹ and the New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH)². Further adjustments to this policy will occur as more information is learned about the virus and the impact vaccinations have on it.

Even with prudent steps being taken to reduce risk of COVID-19 infection, neither the provider nor Division can guarantee that transmission will not occur. For this reason, the individual, family, guardian and provider need to discuss the overall risk a visit poses to the individual's physical and mental health and how they will react to a visit where social distancing and the use of PPE is required. This shall include information contained in CDC guidance found at: www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/activities.html

Public Health Information for Vaccinated Persons

Residents of DDD funded congregate residential settings have been offered COVID-19 vaccination and the opportunity to receive the needed doses. If a DDD agency has not been offered resident vaccination for their [eligible IDD residential settings](#) they are directed to contact PPMU@dhs.nj.gov immediately.

Currently authorized vaccines in the United States are highly effective at protecting vaccinated people against symptomatic and severe COVID-19. Additionally, a [growing body of evidence](#) suggests that fully vaccinated people are less likely to have asymptomatic infection and potentially less likely to transmit COVID-19 to others. At this time, people are considered fully vaccinated for COVID-19 2 or more weeks after they have received the second dose in a 2-dose series (Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna), or 2 or more weeks after they have received a single-dose vaccine (Johnson and Johnson [J&J]/Janssen).

How long vaccine protection lasts and how much vaccines protect against emerging COVID-19 variants are still under investigation. Until more is known and vaccination coverage increases, some prevention measures will continue to be necessary for all people, regardless of vaccination status.

Vaccinated and un-vaccinated people should continue to follow [guidance](#) to protect themselves and others, including wearing a well-fitted [mask](#) meeting CDC criteria, [physical distancing](#) (at least 6 feet), avoiding crowds, avoiding poorly

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/info-by-product/clinical-considerations.html>;
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/guidance-risk-assesment-hcp.html>;
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/nursing-homes-testing.html>.
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/fully-vaccinated-guidance.html>

² https://www.nj.gov/health/cd/documents/topics/NCOV/INFCONT_exp_risk_assess_template_patients_postacute.pdf;
https://www.state.nj.us/health/legal/covid19/8-20_ExecutiveDirectiveNo20-026_LTCResumption_of_Svcs.pdf

ventilated spaces, covering coughs and sneezes, [washing hands](#) often, and following any applicable workplace guidance. All persons should still watch for [symptoms of COVID-19](#), especially following an exposure to someone with suspected or confirmed COVID-19. If symptoms develop, all people – regardless of vaccination status – should isolate and be clinically evaluated for COVID-19, including COVID-19 testing, if indicated. All persons should also continue to follow current [CDC](#) and [NJDOH](#) travel guidance.

Fully vaccinated residents of non-healthcare congregate settings (e.g., group homes) should continue to quarantine for 14 days and be tested for COVID-19 following an exposure to someone with suspected or confirmed COVID-19³.

Visits Within the Residence

Regardless of vaccination status, indoor visitation in congregate residential settings (i.e., group homes, supervised apartments) is required under the circumstances described herein:

- There have been no new positive COVID-19 cases of residents and staff assigned to the residence within the past 14 days;
- The residence is not in the process of performing COVID-19 testing of all residents and staff due to a recent COVID-19 positive test or high risk exposure; and
- No residents or staff of the home are currently symptomatic.

Should a new positive case be identified, visitation within the residence shall be suspended until the above criteria are met. As previously required, there must be adequate physical space in the residence to accommodate other residents and allow the required social distancing to occur during the visit. If these criteria are not met, an alternate indoor location may be identified by the provider or an outdoor visit shall be provided. However, all efforts by the provider to allow visits within the residence to occur shall be made.

Outdoor Visits

Visits outside of the residence are required, weather permitting, when the criteria for indoor visits within the residence are not possible due to this policy. These visits should occur in an outdoor area agreed upon by the provider with sufficient space and seating to allow individuals who have not been residing together to be at least six feet apart. This could be on the property of the home or in a public setting (such as a park) that is not over-crowded.

Outside temperature, weather conditions, availability of restrooms and other facilities should be considered in planning. The residential provider shall provide transportation for the resident. When planning activities, consider those that are appropriate to the needs of the individual and that lend themselves to social distancing.

Visits Requirements (Regardless of Location)

In order for visits to occur, there are three levels of attestation/consent which are required:

- The Residential Provider must complete, sign (including the signature of a witness), and email the **new** [Provider Attestation for Visitation](#) to dhs.ool@dhs.nj.gov before visits begin as early as March 19, 2021.
- The individual or their guardian, if they have a guardian, are required to sign the **new** [Guardian Consent for Visitation During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)*.
- Each visitor must sign the **new** [Visitor Agreement](#)* before meeting with the resident.

**Indicates forms that are to be retained on site by the provider and do not need to be forwarded to the Division.*

Group homes are congregate residential settings where multiple residents reside, generally supported by staff across several shifts. As such, and regardless of vaccination status, certain safeguards will continue to be required when visiting within the setting.

All visits must be scheduled in advance with the residential provider. Generally, visits shall be limited to two visitors

³ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/fully-vaccinated-guidance.html>
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at any one time. In order to accommodate visits for all residents and smooth operation of the residence, the provider may place **reasonable** limits on the duration, time of day and days of the week visits may take place. This is not meant to limit visits for any resident, but to ensure all residents have the opportunity to engage in indoor visitation if they choose to do so. Each person participating in a visit must adhere to the protocols described in [Screening in Residential and Congregate Day Program Settings](#). Visitors are not required to be vaccinated. Additional requirements are:

- Physical distancing (being at least 6 feet apart) is still recommended between the visitor and resident being visited. This continues to be the safest way to prevent the spread of COVID-19, particularly if either party has not been fully vaccinated. However, it is acknowledged that there is no substitute for physical contact, such as the warm embrace between a resident and their loved one. Therefore, and regardless of vaccination status, the resident can choose to have close contact (including touch) with their visitor while wearing a well-fitting facemask (if tolerated). Regardless, visitors should physically distance from other residents and staff in the residence.
- Each person participating in a visit (resident and visitor) must wear a face covering. Information on types of masks and guidance on how to best wear these masks are available from the CDC⁴. The resident should be encouraged to wear a face covering. It is understood that they may not tolerate/be medically advisable for them to do so.
- Visits will occur in an area designated by the provider and visitor movement within the residence will be limited to that area as much as possible. After a visit in a space controlled by the provider concludes, the provider shall clean and disinfect all areas and surfaces that visitors were in contact with, following CDC guidelines⁵.
- To the best of their knowledge, no resident, current staff of the home or person(s) planning to visit have been in close contact (15 or more cumulative minutes within 24-hours) within the last 14 days with someone who recently tested positive for COVID-19 (i.e. in the past two weeks).
- All visitors are required to monitor themselves for signs and symptoms of COVID-19 for at least 14 days after the visit. If symptoms occur, advise them to self-isolate at home until they contact their healthcare provider for guidance on isolation and immediately notify the provider of the date they visited. The provider should immediately screen the resident who had contact, and take all necessary actions based on any findings.

Those persons participating in the visit may want to bring item(s) or food for the resident. The most current CDC guidance on Food and COVID-19 shall be followed⁶.

Other Types of Visits

Regardless of vaccination status for the resident, a group home resident or their guardian may request an off-site visit with a family member or friend, such as an overnight visit to a family member's home or other daytime outing and **not have to isolate upon return** to the residential setting **unless he or she, or the person returning them from their visit, report exposure (15 or more cumulative minutes within 24-hours) to someone with suspected or confirmed COVID-19**. When considering a visit, the resident, guardian, family and agency should consider available guidance referenced in this document, including information contained in the [Guardian Consent for Visitation During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#) form.

Further adjustments to this policy will occur as more information is learned about the virus and the impact vaccinations have on it.

⁴ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html>

⁵ www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/clean-disinfect/index.html

⁶ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/food-and-COVID-19.html>