



Congregate Care Visitation Guidance

Updated November 13, 2020

Effective November 16, 2020

Kathryn Power, Director of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities, and Hospitals (BHDDH) is strongly recommending that all congregate care residences increase visitor restrictions. This recommendation is made in response to the increasing number of individuals diagnosed with COVID-19 globally, and in Rhode Island, at the onset of the influenza respiratory illness season.

Background

In August 2020, BHDDH issued guidance specific to licensed congregate care settings and requested that facilities develop a **facility-specific visitation plan** in order to safely ease visitor restrictions. This relaxed visitor guidance balanced the importance of visitation with the need to protect residents, patients, staff, providers, and visitors. These plans addressed scheduling of visits, screening for COVID-19 symptoms, practicing social distancing, hand hygiene, wearing a cloth face covering or facemask (both residents and visitors) for the duration of their visit, physical location of the visit, cleaning and disinfecting, communication, and when to pause visitation.

On September 17, 2020, The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services released guidance, affirming the importance of visitation, while noting that visitation may still be restricted due to the COVID-19 county positivity rate in the county where the facility is located, the facility's COVID-19 status, a resident's COVID-19 status, visitor symptoms, lack of adherence to proper infection control practices, or other relevant factors related to the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency.

Unfortunately, in the last few weeks, COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations have been increasing, prompting Director Power to issue the **strong recommendation that all BHDDH licensed congregate care facilities institute a "NO VISITATION" policy.**

Continued adherence to all safety measures and cooperation with surveillance testing whenever possible remains critically important.

No visitation unless required under federal guidance, or in certain other circumstances.

- Visitation is suspended unless required under federal guidance (*See September 17 CMS Guidance*); or in certain other limited clinical circumstances, including compassionate care.
- Compassionate Care visits are allowed only under certain circumstances according to the core principles of COVID-19 infection prevention, the facility visitation plan, and federal guidance. Even under these circumstances, anyone who meets the conditions listed above is prohibited from visiting, in addition to those who are younger than 18.

Compassionate Care Visits

Compassionate care visits should be allowed at all levels of visitor restrictions. This includes, *but is not limited to*, end-of-life situations.

Alternatives to In-Person Visitation

Regardless of the phase, *facilities must have a process in place, at all times, to facilitate remote communications between a resident and a virtual visitor* (e.g. video call applications on cell phones or tablets).