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Greetings,

We find ourselves in trying times as are confronted by the COVID-19 crisis. All our lives have been impacted from restrictions on gatherings, to concerns about how we can keep ourselves healthy.

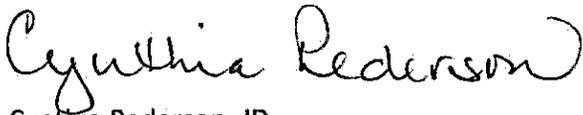
I wanted to take this opportunity to let you know that even though representatives of this office (Office of the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman) have not been able to enter the facility where you live at this time, we still remain available to advocate for issues you may be experiencing.

In this packet of information, you will find this quarter's Resident Advocate newsletter published by Consumer Voice and also a fact sheet with information that you and your families need to know.

Please take care of yourselves and remember you are not alone in the effort of overcoming the COVID-19 crisis.

Always remember you can call us toll-free at 1-866-236-1430 with any questions or concerns. All calls are confidential.

Stay well,



Cynthia Pederson, JD
Iowa State Long-Term Care Ombudsman

THE RESIDENT ADVOCATE

A newsletter for long-term care residents containing news and information on rights, care issues, and updates on national policy.

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Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by a new virus. It can lead to respiratory illness with symptoms such as a cough, fever, and shortness of breath.

COVID-19: Stay Engaged

Throughout the world people are being affected by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), which is an infectious disease caused by a new virus. It can lead to respiratory illness with symptoms such as a cough, fever, and shortness of breath. This is an unprecedented time and we are all learning to cope and adjust together. To reduce the spread in nursing homes, the federal government has instituted some temporary changes, such as restricting who can come into the facility - only essential health care workers, and stopping communal dining and group activities. They are also allowing more flexibility in moving residents to different rooms and between facilities. While maintaining physical health is very important during this time, it is also necessary to maintain your mental health. Explore ways to stay connected to family and friends. Continue to express your needs to staff.

While there may be changes in your facility due to COVID-19, you still have the right to person-centered care. Below are tips for staying engaged and advocating for yourself to receive the care you deserve.

- **Stay Connected** - While restricting visitation and group gatherings is an added level of precaution meant to keep everyone safe, technology can be helpful to stay in touch and stay busy during this time. Ask your facility to provide access to Wi-Fi and devices such as cell phones, tablets, or computers to help you stay in touch with your family, Ombudsman, and online resources. Consider ways to keep the resident council going, such as by sending notes or talking on the phone to the resident council president, who can then convey issues and information to the designated staff person.
- **Communicate Your Needs** - Maintain as much of your normal routine as possible, including the care you receive. Talk with staff about getting fresh air and facilitating exercises that you can do in or out of bed depending on your abilities. You should still receive the assistance you need. Do not be afraid to ask for help. Staff are there for you.
- **Practice Good Hygiene** - Ask facility staff about the best ways to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 and other infections. Remind them to wash their hands often and cover their mouths when they cough. You can also ask your facility to post signs to encourage the same etiquette from others. It's okay to remind others to practice good hygiene.
- **Raise Concerns** – Speak up about care and rights violations with facility administration, staff, and with the long-term care ombudsman program. Find contact information for your ombudsman here: https://theconsumervoice.org/get_help.

Tips for Prevention



Take the same precautions to protect yourself from COVID-19 that you would from other viruses and infections.

- Wash your hands and avoid touching your face. While soap and water work best, hand sanitizers with at least 60% alcohol will also be effective.
- Distance yourself and limit interactions with others as much as possible. It is recommended to stay six feet away from others.
- Remind staff and others to wash their hands, cover their mouths when they cough, and frequently use disinfectant cleaners on surfaces.
- Ask the administrator about their infection control procedures and how they are working to prevent the spread of the virus. Ask that they inform all residents and families if the virus is found in the facility.

You may see an increase in the use of personal protective equipment such as facemasks, gloves, and gowns. This is to protect you and the staff from contracting or spreading the virus.

Staying Connected During Isolation

As we all are distancing ourselves, staying connected to each other can become more challenging. Below are creative ideas and practices for staying connected during this time of isolation.

- Send hand-written letters and cards.
- Use technology, such as video conferencing (Skype, FaceTime), Facebook, text messages, or email.
- “Visit” with friends and family through a window or glass door.
- Brainstorm ideas for maintaining regular activities while isolating like playing bingo by using call lights, conducting an exercise class via video chat, or playing individual games like bowling in the hallway.
- Think of creative ways to bring entertainers into the facility such as asking local musicians, magicians, or talented family members to perform outdoors, use the intercom system, or use video chat to perform.
- Use this time to watch your favorite movie, discover a new book, listen to an audio book, read a magazine, or work on an art project.
- Use free online resources to access opera and symphony performances; visit world-famous museums or libraries virtually; take a virtual walk through museums or watch webcams of sights like the zoo or the International Space Station.

Share love from a distance

Post a photo and share tips on how you're staying connected to loved ones. Use **#LoveFromADistance** on social media and tag us on Facebook: @theconsumervoice and Twitter: @ConsumerVoices. If you are not on social media and would like to participate, email info@theconsumervoice.org.

For more information and resources on supporting COVID-19 prevention in long-term facilities, visit <https://theconsumervoice.org/issues/other-issues-and-resources/covid-19>.



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COVID-19 AND NURSING HOMES

What Residents and Family Need to Know

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by a new virus. It can lead to respiratory illness with symptoms such as a cough, fever, and shortness of breath. In a growing number of cases, it can be more severe than the flu, with a higher mortality rate. Certain populations are more at risk of getting this virus, including individuals age 60 or older and people of any age with serious underlying medical conditions.

In an effort to reduce the spread of the virus in nursing homes, the federal government has:

- Focused efforts and resources only on inspections related to infection control and investigation of complaints assessed as being the most serious and harmful to residents.
- Restricted visitation of:
 - Visitors/Family members, who are only permitted in compassionate care situations, such as end of life, and only if they show no signs/symptoms of COVID-19.
 - Non-essential health care workers.
 - Long-term care ombudsmen.
- Directed facilities to actively screen residents and staff for fever and signs/symptoms of COVID-19.
- Instructed facilities to cancel communal dining and all group activities.

Residents and families can stay connected in a number of ways, including:

- Sending handwritten letters and cards.
- Using technology, such as video conferencing (Skype, FaceTime), Facebook, text message, or email.
- Making video greetings, including through apps such as WhatsApp and Marco Polo.
- “Visiting” through a window or glass door.

See the Consumer Voice website and Facebook page for other examples of how residents and families are staying connected.
Use #lovefromadistance.

The nursing home should be taking steps to prevent and control COVID-19

Staff should:

- Wear personal protective equipment, such as facemasks and gloves.
- Wash their hands or use hand sanitizer before and after contact with each resident, after using medical equipment, and after taking off masks, gowns, and/or gloves.
- Place alcohol-based hand sanitizer in all resident-care areas, including both inside and outside resident rooms.
- Practice cough etiquette/hygiene.
- Stay home when sick.
- Clean residents' hands after toileting or eating.
- Clean and disinfect medical equipment between residents and areas of the facility.

Administration should:

- Complete a special assessment developed by the federal government to determine if the facility's infection control plan and protections are adequate to address COVID-19.
- Communicate frequently with local and state Departments of Health, Emergency Management, and CDC to share facility conditions, obtain the most up-to-date information and resources, and ask for help as needed.
- Put a plan in place for frequent communication with residents and families about facility conditions and individual resident updates.

What to do if there are concerns about the facility's infection control practices or other issues

- Talk to the director of nursing or administrator about your concerns and ask what they will do to address them.
- Contact the Long-Term Care Ombudsman program for assistance. The Ombudsman program advocates for residents and can help resolve concerns. To locate the program that covers the facility, go to: https://theconsumervoice.org/get_help.
- File a complaint with your state survey agency.
 - This agency is currently focusing only on complaints classified as "Immediate Jeopardy," which means that the problem/concern has caused or could cause serious harm, injury, impairment, or death. If you believe your concern rises to that level, make sure to indicate that in your complaint.
 - File a complaint even if you don't think it is Immediate Jeopardy. The complaint will still be entered into the system. The federal government will be issuing guidance about how these complaints will be handled.

To find contact information for the survey agency, go to: https://theconsumervoice.org/get_help.

While several changes and limitations have been temporarily put in place because of the COVID-19 crisis,

residents still have the right to:

- Receive the care and services needed to obtain their highest possible level of well-being.
- Participate in developing and implementing a person-centered plan of care that reflects personal and cultural preferences. This includes the resident's right to make decisions about their care now and in the future, such as what treatment they might want related to COVID-19.
- Be free from abuse, neglect, exploitation, and misappropriation of resident property.
- Voice grievances without discrimination or retaliation, or the fear of it, and prompt efforts by the facility to resolve those grievances.
- Not be discharged or transferred except for certain reasons, to appeal the decision, and have a safe and orderly discharge/transfer if the resident leaves the facility.

Residents and families can promote good, safe care and keep up resident morale

Residents can:

- Wash their hands (or ask staff to assist them) or use hand sanitizer and remind other residents to do the same.
- Practice social distancing from other residents – stay 6 feet away.
- Inform supervisors/administration if they observe staff who appear to be sick or not taking the steps listed above to prevent the spread of COVID-19.
- Request that the administrator:
 - Provide regular updates to residents about what the facility is doing to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and/or care for any residents who are ill.
 - Share the results of the facility's self-assessment of its infection control practices.
- Ask facility staff to schedule a regular time for residents to communicate with their family and to assist them if they need help.
- Remember that they can still use the facility's grievance process if they have any complaints or concerns.
- Consider ways to keep the resident council going, even if residents cannot meet in person. Perhaps residents can bring up issues by sending notes or talking by phone to the resident council president, who can then convey them to the designated staff person.
- Ask activities staff to find creative ways to continue regular activities even with residents in their rooms, such as playing bingo using call lights or conducting an exercise class via video chat.

Families can:

- Find out what steps the facility is taking to keep residents safe. Request that the administrator tell families how the facility performed on its self-assessment.
- Ask how the facility will provide updates on their loved one and whom they should contact if they have questions.
- Request the facility set up a schedule for when they can connect with their loved one by phone, video, “window visiting,” or other method.
- Ask the administrator to seek permission from the family of other residents to share their email addresses with each other. Families can create a group email and use it to communicate with other family members, bring questions and concerns to the facility or the Ombudsman program, or provide support to one another.

For more information on this issue, go to:

<https://theconsumervoice.org/issues/other-issues-and-resources/covid-19>

The National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care

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