Tennessee Removes State Visitation Restrictions for Long-term Care Facilities

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NASHVILLE – Today the Tennessee Department of Health announced state-specific visitation restrictions for long-term care facilities will end effective February 28, 2021. Facilities should use the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services guidance for safe operation and visitation with limited visitation restrictions no longer in place at the state level.

The Tennessee Department of Health recognizes the extraordinary challenges long-term care facilities, their residents and the family members and caregivers of these particularly vulnerable Tennesseans have faced during the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result of the federal long-term care facility pharmacy partnership, 100 percent of Tennessee's nursing homes and skilled nursing facilities have completed both doses of COVID-19 vaccinations, and Tennessee's assisted care living facilities and residential homes for the aged are projected to be completed this week.

"The health and safety of vulnerable Tennesseans, especially our long-term care residents, remains our top priority, and our comprehensive and persistent efforts to protect this population from COVID-19 have saved lives," said Tennessee Health Commissioner Lisa Piercey, MD, MBA, FAAP. "Now that vaccinations at all long-term care facilities are nearing completion, we are ready to transition to a more sustainable approach of following these best practices for safe operation of long-term care facilities in Tennessee."

Guidance for Visitation

The guidance issued by CMS provides reasonable ways a nursing home can safely facilitate in-person visits to address residents' social and emotional needs. Certified Medicare and Medicaid facilities should continue to follow the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Visitation Guidance. Per this guidance, nursing homes may allow indoor visitation when there has been no new onset of COVID-19 cases in the last 14 days and the facility is not currently conducting outbreak testing.

Long-term care facilities licensed by the state, which include Tennessee assisted care living facilities, residential homes for the aged and any nursing home not certified by CMS, should reference industry best practices including CMS Visitation Guidance and review related laws and rules when developing their own facility-specific visitation policies and procedures.

The CMS guidance outlines how facilities may expand communal dining and other group activities, provided infection control policies are followed. Even as COVID-19 case counts decline, facilities should remain vigilant in monitoring for COVID-19 cases among residents and staff members through appropriate screening and testing. Facilities may test visitors, which is encouraged, but not required. Additional resources on infection control practices are available from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The following resources are available for long-term care facilities when updating and developing their visitation policies and procedures.

CMS Visitation Guidance:
www.cms.gov/files/document/qso-20-39-nh.pdf

CDC Infection Control Resources:
www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/infection-control-recommendations.html

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