DHSS to Begin Approving Plans for Indoor Visitation at Delaware's Long-Term Care Facilities

NEW CASTLE (Sept. 3, 2020) – For Delaware's long-term care facilities with low rates of COVID-19 cases, the Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) will begin to review proposed plans from eligible facilities to resume indoor visitation. To protect residents and staff, visitation has not been permitted at Delaware's 88 long-term care facilities since mid-March, when the state's first positive COVID-19 case was announced.

Beginning in June, eligible nursing homes and assisted-living facilities were able to submit plans for outdoor visitation. As of Sept. 2, 2020, the plans of 26 nursing homes and assisted-living facilities have been approved by DHSS' Division of Health Care Quality (DHCQ).

Under DHSS' COVID-19 reopening plan for long-term care facilities, which takes effect on Sept. 8, 2020, those facilities that have not had a new positive COVID-19 case originate there within the last 14 days and have adequate staffing to meet the needs of residents would be eligible to submit a plan for resuming indoor visitation. Visits will be limited to one to two people per resident and will be by appointment only. Visits must occur in a visitation room near an entrance.

"We know that families and close friends of residents of nursing homes and assisted-living facilities have been eager to see their loved ones indoors again," DHSS Secretary Molly Magarik said. "We are pleased that our Division of Health Care Quality and Division of Public Health will be working with eligible long-term care facilities across the state to provide this opportunity for indoor visitation."

As indoor visitation plans are approved by the Division of Health Care Quality, long-term care facilities will make families aware that visitations can be scheduled. Among the other requirements for indoor visitation:

- Visitors must make an appointment, with only 1-2 visitors per resident allowed.
- They must check in upon arrival.
- Only residents who are negative for COVID-19 or recovered from the disease may have visitors.
- Visitors and residents must wear face masks at all times and must practice proper hand hygiene.
- All visitors must maintain social distancing of at least 6 feet and must not have contact with the resident they are visiting.
- Visitor testing is strongly encouraged, but at the discretion of each facility.
- Staff will monitor the visits to ensure safety compliance.
- Staff will disinfect the visitation area before and after each visit.
- If the facility has a COVID-19 positive case originate there, indoor visitation would be suspended until the facility again reaches the 14-day mark without a new case.

In addition, assuming no infections, long-term care facility administrators can work with each resident's family to designate one support person – a family member or other outside caregiver – who, prior to visitor restrictions, was a regular visitor at least two times per week. The support person will be able to provide companionship and assist with such activities as bathing, grooming and meal set-up if needed.

Under the guidance provided by DHSS, long-term care facilities must follow these rules in designating one support person per resident:

- The support person should be a family member or outside caregiver (friend, volunteer, private person caregiver), age 18 or older, who provided regular care and support to the resident before the pandemic.
- The designation of the support person is at the discretion of the facility administrator and only upon agreement by the resident or his or her representative.
- A negative COVID-19 test is required before the support person can be scheduled, and the support person is subject to regular testing currently required of vendors entering all long-term care facilities.
- The schedule and amount of time in the facility must be agreed to in advance and may be one to four hours per day based on the resident's care plan. The facility must allow evening and weekend visits in order to accommodate the support person's schedule.
- A central point of entry must be designated where the support person signs in and is actively screened for symptoms of COVID-19 before entering the building.
- The support person must wear personal protective equipment (PPE) – a cloth face mask at all times and gloves when providing direct resident care – and must perform frequent hand hygiene. The facility will provide hand sanitizing stations and alcohol-based hand rubs.
- The support person must inform the long-term care facility if he or she develops a fever or other symptoms consistent with COVID-19 within 14 days of a planned visit with a resident.
- The support person must provide care in the resident's room or in facility-designated area. The support person may take the resident for a walk outside, but both individuals must be wearing face masks and other appropriate PPE.
- The support person must maintain social distancing of at least 6 feet with staff and other residents while in the building.
- The facility may restrict or revoke the support person's status if the person fails to follow social distancing, face mask or other COVID-19-related rules of the facility.

To read the order, reopening plan and support person guidance go to the long-term care section of the coronavirus website.