

News Release: HHS Provides Expanded Guidance to Nursing Facilities to Prevent Spread of COVID-19 in Texas

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AUSTIN – To protect older, medically fragile individuals from COVID-19, Texas Health and Human Services (HHS) has issued updated, expanded guidance to nursing homes that now includes restricting facility access to staff, certain medical professionals, and other providers of essential services.

“At the direction of Governor Greg Abbott and effective immediately, we are now requiring nursing facilities to prevent non-essential visitors from access given the significant health and safety risk to residents posed by COVID-19,” said David Kostroun, HHS deputy executive commissioner for Regulatory Services. “These measures are precautionary and based on the state disaster declaration made by Governor Abbott, as well as new federal guidance.”

Until further notice, nursing facilities are encouraged to use alternate means of communication such as FaceTime, Skype, or other video or audio systems for residents to maintain contact with family and friends. “We understand how difficult these new restrictions will be for residents and their families and loved ones,” Kostroun said. “First and foremost, we must all share the goal of protecting the people who are proving to be most vulnerable to this new virus.”

Nursing facilities must also implement screening protocols for anyone entering their facility. They must screen staff, medical professionals, and other essential visitors for COVID-19 using guidelines issued by the [Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services](#) (CMS). Only under certain compassionate care situations, such as a resident’s end-of-life, can non-essential visitors be allowed in a nursing facility, and the facility must follow all CMS protocols.

Texas HHS is working closely with the Office of the Governor, the Department of State Health Services (DSHS), the Texas Department of Emergency Management, and other state and federal agencies to monitor and assess the coronavirus outbreak in the U.S.

Additionally, HHSC staff are conducting targeted inspections of facilities with a history of infection control deficiencies in the previous three years.

Long-term care facilities in Texas are required to maintain strong infection prevention and control programs to prevent the spread of communicable diseases. If a facility believes a resident, visitor, or employee might have been exposed or infected with COVID-19, it is required to immediately report it to their local health department or to DSHS.

Texas HHS is also requiring facilities to post signs at the entrance about access restrictions; check for fever of visitors, staff, and residents; suspend group gatherings; continue to monitor and isolate residents with fever or acute respiratory symptoms; provide infection control training to staff; execute frequent handwashing; and provide personal protective equipment to residents or staff as needed. For more information, visit the [CDC's site](#).

During this rapidly evolving situation, the agency will be issuing updated and additional infection control guidance for other licensed entities such as general and psychiatric hospitals, child care operations, and long-term care facilities. Providers are encouraged to stay up-to-date on the latest guidance by visiting the Texas HHS [COVID-19 page](#).

Texas HHS licenses and regulates 1,222 nursing facilities throughout the state.

For health-related information and general precautions on COVID-19, visit the [DSHS website](#) and the [CDC page](#).