The Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH) issues these updates and clarifications to guidance for nursing homes and assisted living facilities in response to questions.

**Admissions**

A nursing home/assisted living facility (facility) should admit any individual(s) that they would normally admit to their facility, including individuals who are positive for COVID-19. It is expected at this point in the pandemic, since RIDOH has provided on-site and remote technical assistance, every facility should have achieved the minimum competency and infection control practices to care for a resident who is positive for COVID-19. RIDOH’s permission is not required to accept residents who are positive for COVID-19.

RIDOH’s COVID-19 response unit may recommend that admissions to a facility be suspended if there is an outbreak; however, a facility must re-admit established residents who are transferred to a hospital in accordance with transfer and discharge requirements, even if there is a recommendation to suspend admissions.

RIDOH’s COVID-19 response unit will make it clear when an affected facility should suspend admissions and when they may resume admissions. Each facility will be expected to ensure that this information is included in its Long-Term Care Mutual Aid Plan (LTC-MAP) after it is provided to the facility by RIDOH.

For additional information on facility admissions, please refer to [Guidance on Hospital Discharges to Long-Term Care Facilities, Home Isolation, and Quarantine Facilities to Prevent the Spread of COVID-19](https://www.rhodeisland.gov/doh/covid19), dated October 20, 2020.

**Staff Quarantine**

Nursing home staff are considered critical infrastructure workers. As such, they are permitted to work during quarantine, if needed, to provide adequate staffing coverage. This does not apply to staff who are in isolation because they have tested positive for COVID-19.*

While at work, asymptomatic staff must:

- Wear a surgical mask at all times (or higher-level personal protective equipment, as indicated).
- Monitor temperature and symptoms every four hours.
- Cease working and isolate immediately if symptoms develop.

*Positive asymptomatic staff who are in isolation can only work in a staffing crisis if they have received permission from RIDOH. Refer to guidance below.

Temporary Emergency Nursing Assistant Extensions for Staff

As part of RIDOH’s continued response to COVID-19, RIDOH will continue to relax regulatory enforcement for Nursing Assistant licensing by extending temporary emergency licenses for 180 days.

Individuals who were already issued a temporary emergency Nursing Assistant license can renew it one time. Nursing Assistants who have an active license in another state can obtain the temporary emergency license with the application and verification of their active out-of-state license. RIDOH is accepting the eight-hour Nursing Assistant training only for students enrolled in the Rhode Island Department of Labor & Training’s SkillsRI Program.

If an individual:
- Currently holds a temporary emergency Nursing Assistant license OR
- Previously held a temporary emergency Nursing Assistant license that expired after October 1, 2020, and the individual is currently working in a clinical setting providing Nursing Assistant services

RIDOH will extend the individual’s Nursing Assistant license for an additional 180 days from the date of expiration.

The purpose of the 180-day extension is to allow temporary emergency licensees to enroll in an approved Nursing Assistant training program and pass the State examination to become permanently licensed. If an individual is currently enrolled in an approved Nursing Assistant training program, the applicant must provide this information on the Extension Application where indicated.

Shared Room Use

The following is permitted during admissions backlog conditions, when established thresholds for new hospital admissions has exceeded established parameters:

- **Isolation:** A positive resident in the facility and a positive patient discharged from the hospital can share a room together in the facility provided both cases are within 90 days of their positive test result (or symptom onset date if symptomatic). Both residents must be asymptomatic. If either individual develops symptoms, they must be separated immediately.

- **Quarantine:** If resources allow, residents in quarantine should each have a separate room. However, effective November 25, 2020, individuals who are new admissions and quarantining can also share a room, but they should:
  - Have a point-of-care rapid test performed upon admission **AND**
  - Have testing at days 4-5, 9-10, and 14.

Note that individuals who have recovered from COVID and are admitted to a hospital and discharged do not need to be quarantined in the 90-day window after their initial test date (or symptom onset date if symptomatic).

Efforts should be made to keep residents in the semi-private room separate as much as possible, with appropriate mask wearing when within six feet of each other, as well as using hand sanitizer whenever appropriate. Shared objects shall be minimized.

If a resident tests positive, they should immediately be moved out of the shared room. If the residents share a bathroom, the bathroom should be cleaned after every use. The resident sharing the room should begin a new 14-day quarantine period given the exposure.

Established parameters will be linked to [data on RIDOH’s website](#).
The residents should be tested at exit from quarantine.

The facility must set up stringent infection control procedures, including placing a barrier (privacy curtain) between the residents and requiring staff to don/doff PPE when caring for each resident. In addition, full PPE precautions between roommates should be practiced to mitigate risks. Adequate ventilation should be ensured.

When backlog conditions abate, and as soon as single rooms are available to quarantine residents, the facility should place residents in a single room or separate observation area so the resident can be monitored for symptoms of COVID-19.

For additional information on facility admissions, please refer to Guidance on Hospital Discharges to Long-Term Care Facilities, Home Isolation, and Quarantine Facilities to Prevent the Spread of COVID-19 dated October 20, 2020

**Off-Site Holiday Celebrations**

RIDOH’s guidance for off-site holiday celebration applies to congregate care facilities with residents and families contemplating taking, or who have decided to take, a resident off site to attend a holiday celebration. Any agreements between a resident and a facility regarding off-site celebrations that occur during the COVID-19 pandemic should include the following guidelines.

On November 18, 2020, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) issued an Alert regarding holidays. In part CMS notes, “While CMS supports family engagement and a resident’s right to leave a nursing home, everyone needs to work together to take extra precautions to help reduce the spread of COVID-19, which can pose an elevated danger to the health of nursing home residents. Therefore, CMS recommends against residents leaving the nursing home during this Public Health Emergency.”

CMS further notes, “With the potential for a safe and effective vaccine on the immediate horizon, extra precautions now are essential to protect nursing home residents until a vaccine becomes available. Leaving the facility could increase a resident’s risk for exposure to COVID-19. The risk may be further increased by factors such as a resident’s health status, the spread of COVID-19 in the community (e.g., cases or positivity rate), or attendance at large gatherings.”

Given the statements from CMS and the recent rapid increase in positive cases in Rhode Island and in Rhode Island’s congregate care facilities, RIDOH strongly recommends against residents leaving the congregate care facility for any non-medically necessary reason, including holiday celebrations.

The facility is strongly urged to provide residents and their families who are contemplating taking, or who have decided to take, a resident off site to attend a holiday celebration with the following important message:

- “For the safety of your loved one and the community, we encourage you to communicate with the facility or residence before making plans to bring your loved one home to understand its policies and ensure your celebration is as safe as possible.”

Should a resident ultimately decide to leave the congregate care facility for an off-site celebration, RIDOH recommends:
Advise residents and their families who attend a holiday celebration outside the facility that they must adhere to all current executive orders and regulations regarding social gatherings, physical distancing, and masking. Specifically:

- Limit close contact (maintain physical distancing of six feet or more) and keep all indoor and outdoor social gatherings limited to the resident and members of a single household only.
- Wear facemasks or cloth face covering at all times (including in cars, homes, restaurants, etc.).
- Use technology to engage with others remotely.
- Limit contact with commonly touched surfaces or shared items.
- Keep safe around food and drinks. Avoid communal serving utensils, passing of food, potluck or buffet style food service, and instead opt for individually prepared plates by a single server.
- Perform hand hygiene often (e.g., wash hands with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer).
- Avoid large gatherings, crowded areas, and high-risk activities such as singing.
- For those attending a gathering, avoid contact with individuals outside of their household for 14 days prior to the gathering.
- Ask anyone who has signs or symptoms of COVID-19, or has been exposed to someone diagnosed with COVID-19, to not attend the gathering.
- If possible, conduct gatherings outdoors. Indoor gatherings should have good ventilation, open windows and doors if possible.
- Verbally greet others instead of shaking hands or giving hugs. Think ahead about how you will manage to prevent physical interactions with loved ones of different ages such as young children.
- Check local conditions and State requirements for precautions and restrictions, including positivity rates and quarantine requirements, before crossing state lines.

Upon a resident’s return from attending an off-site holiday celebration, the facility is strongly urged to:

- Rapid test the resident as soon as possible after the resident returns.
- Quarantine the resident for 14 days.
- PCR test the resident at day 14.

If the results on Day 14 are negative, the resident can be discharged from quarantine.