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Dear Families,

As we begin the holiday season, the Commonwealth is offering some considerations and recommendations on how to celebrate the holidays with your loved ones who reside in a congregate care setting such as a nursing home, residential treatment program, or group home. We know that the holidays are an important time for you and your loved ones. As you make plans to visit and celebrate with your loved one, we encourage you to assess the risk of getting or spreading COVID-19.

Staying Safe this Holiday Season

The Department of Public Health (DPH) released [guidance](#) earlier this month that all Massachusetts residents should follow, offering considerations for how to keep friends, families and our communities safe during the holiday season. While any gathering poses some risk, you can reduce the risk of getting or spreading COVID-19 by wearing a mask, keeping the guest list small and limited to one household, and keeping visits short when social distancing cannot be maintained.

There are important considerations when planning celebrations with a loved one who lives in a congregate setting. Many people living in congregate settings are uniquely vulnerable to COVID-19 and may have health conditions putting them at a higher risk of becoming sick, or even severely ill, with COVID-19. When deciding whether to include your loved one in a holiday gathering, it is important to take into account both the health and safety of your loved one, as well as the health and safety of your loved one's roommates, other people living on their floor or in their home, and the staff that care for them.

There are a number of ways to celebrate the holidays with your loved one. Due to the rise in cases across the state and country, we recommend participating in a lower risk visit with your loved one.

Examples of Ways to Celebrate

Low risk: Celebrate virtually with your loved one using methods such as Skype, FaceTime, WhatsApp, or Google Duo.

Low-medium risk: Visit your loved one at their residence. Bring a favorite Thanksgiving food or a holiday treat (within the facility's guidelines), following safety guidelines including mask wearing, hand washing, and social distancing. The risk level of a visit to the facility or residence depends on the number of visitors and the potential exposure to COVID-19 that any of the visitors may have had.

Medium-high risk: Bring your loved one home to celebrate with just your household, following safety guidelines including mask wearing, hand washing, social distancing, and frequent cleaning of high touch surfaces. For two weeks prior to your holiday gatherings, limit exposure to COVID-19 by avoiding indoor settings with people you don't live with where you cannot socially distance or wear a mask (e.g., indoor social events, restaurants, carpooling). Your loved one may need to quarantine for 14 days upon return to their congregate care setting.

Very high risk: Bring your loved one home to celebrate with multiple households, and/or not following social distancing, handwashing, cleaning, or mask guidance.

Guidelines on Visits and Travel

All in-person visits and off-sites must follow established guidance and protocols. Please check the latest visitation guidance for [long-term care facilities](#), [ALRs](#), and [congregate care settings](#) and contact your loved one's residence about setting up an in-person visit or making off-site arrangements.

Prior to any in-person visit, all participants should [screen](#) themselves for [COVID-19 symptoms](#) and are encouraged to get a COVID-19 test. Please check [Mass.gov/GetTested](#) for locations. Out-of-state family members visiting for the holidays must comply with all travel requirements outlined in the Massachusetts [COVID-19 travel order](#). You are exempt from these requirements if your travel is limited to a brief trip to visit a person in a long-term care or congregate care setting. For example, driving from Rhode Island (or another high-risk state) to Massachusetts to visit a parent in a nursing home for 45 minutes, and then immediately returning home.

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 their policies and ensure your celebration is as safe as possible. Facilities and residences may require your loved one to quarantine for 14 days when they return to the facility or residence if you bring them home for a celebration, out of concern for the safety of your loved one and others. If your loved one must quarantine, they may be asked to quarantine in a temporary room for the safety of others.

Additional Resources

In addition to discussing with your loved one's facility or residence, there are resources available to discuss how to safely celebrate with your loved one. Families of loved ones in long-term care settings, including ALRs, can contact the [Nursing Home Family Resource at 617-660-5399](#). Families of loved ones in other congregate settings should reach out to their loved one's case manager, social worker, or service coordinator for additional support.

We hope that you and your loved ones have a safe and healthy holiday season.

Sincerely,



Marylou Sudders