

Massachusetts Restricts Visitors to Nursing Home, Rest Homes to Reduce Risk of Coronavirus

The Baker-Polito Administration released policies restricting visitors to nursing homes and rest homes in order to protect older adults at higher risk for Coronavirus (COVID-19) and other respiratory illness. Health and Human Services Secretary Marylou Sudders, Department of Public Health Commissioner Monica Bharel and their teams reviewed the guidance with long term care facility operators via teleconference today.

This action follows Governor Charlie Baker's Tuesday declaration of a State of Emergency in Massachusetts that was ratified by the Public Health Council earlier today granting the Commissioner of Public Health with the authority to implement the Governor's State of Emergency.

With this authority, the Commissioner of Public Health issued an order requiring all facilities – nursing and rest homes – to actively screen all visitors and to take measures to restrict visitors under certain circumstances.

"Everyone has a role to play to mitigate the spread of the Coronavirus outbreak in Massachusetts, and it's particularly important that we take precautions to keep older adults and those with health conditions safe," said Governor Charlie Baker. "This new guidance for long-term care facilities is critical to protecting older adults from COVID-19 and we appreciate the public's willingness to observe these important rules for the foreseeable future."

"Today's actions are being taken to protect older adults that are particularly vulnerable to coronavirus and other

respiratory diseases, as we have seen as its spread across the world, including the United States,” said Secretary Marylou Sudders. “Massachusetts, as we all know has an aging population – with 20% of residents being over 60 – and so we needed to act to protect our older residents, especially those in long term care facilities.”

“Our goal at DPH is to protect the health and well-being of all Massachusetts residents, especially those at highest risk for COVID-19,” said Commissioner Monica Bharel, MD, MPH. “We will continue to update our guidance as this outbreak evolves.”

This guidance outlines how these facilities should protect older adult residents, who are at higher risk for Coronavirus. The guidance includes the following restrictions:

- Banning visitors who show signs or symptoms of a respiratory infection (fever, cough, shortness of breath, or sore throat)
- Visitors will be prohibited if in the last 14 days they had contact with someone with a confirmed diagnosis of COVID-19, are under investigation for COVID-19 or has been sick
- Visitors will be prohibited if they have travelled internationally in the last 14 days or are residing in a community where community-based spread of COVID-19 is occurring
- Visitors will not be allowed to visit long term care facilities if they currently feel sick or exhibit symptoms

In addition to specific recommendations for long term care facilities, the Administration updated its guidance to the general public, specifically urging older adults and those with health issues to avoid large crowds and events. Individuals who live in households with vulnerable people, like elderly parents, should also consider avoiding crowds to mitigate risk. This guidance is posted on the Department of Public Health’s website, www.mass.gov/2019coronavirus.

The public is reminded of steps to take to limit the spread of COVID-19:

- Cover your mouth – when you cough or sneeze use a tissue or your inner elbow, not your hands
- Wash your hands – with soap and warm water or use an alcohol-based sanitizing gel
- Stay home if you are sick – and avoid close contact with others

The Administration will continue to update the public on further developments and individuals are encouraged to consult both the Department of Public Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention websites for the most up to date information.