

Guidance for Managers and Owners: Preventing the Spread of COVID-19 in Senior Living Communities, such as Retirement Communities and Independent Living Facilities

All facilities should help prevent the spread of novel coronavirus (COVID-19). In a retirement community or independent living facility, it is especially important because residents are at higher risk for severe illness, and the communal nature of the facilities, services and activities may increase the risk for exposure to the virus. Every community is unique, so it is up to you, the owners, operators and administrators, to be proactive, find what works at your location, and make a plan to protect your residents and staff. This guidance is for 55+ housing facilities and communities that are not long-term care facilities, residential care facilities, hospice, or other settings where there are dedicated staff in place to support residents.

This guidance includes steps to take now to prevent the spread of COVID-19 *before* there is a case in your facility. When the Health Department learns that a resident or staff member of your facility tests positive for COVID-19, a member of the COVID-19 response team will contact the property owner/manager to provide additional guidance. The Health Department will not disclose the identity of the individual unless there is a public health need to do so.

Make a plan.

- Assess your facility's operational requirements.
- Cross-train employees to ensure coverage for those operational requirements.
- Implement policies and practices with staff for social distancing, limiting visitors, staff coverage, flexible leave policies, and rapid communication.
- Implement guidance with residents for social distancing and rapid communication.
- Share your plans with residents and let them know what they can do right now. Respond to residents' questions and concerns quickly.
- Plan to operationalize additional recommendations from the Health Department if a case associated with your facility is identified.
- Visit healthvermont.gov/COVID-19 to stay up to date on the most recent information and general guidance.

Prepare your common spaces and activities.

Cancel all public or non-essential activities and events.

For essential activities:

- Limit the number of attendees and practice social distancing.

- Change schedules to reduce interactions, like staggering mealtimes or creating a schedule for the laundry room.
- Line all trash cans and ensure that staff who handle trash wear disposable gloves.
- Move tables, chairs and other seating areas 6 feet apart.

Limit the number of people entering the facility and implement illness screening.

- Only allow essential staff, volunteers, vendors, or visitors to enter the facility.
- Screen people entering the facility by taking their temperature and asking about symptoms.
- Inform visitors or staff that if they have fever (100.4 °F or higher) or respiratory symptoms, they should immediately put on a cloth face covering, if they aren't already wearing one, and leave the facility.

Clean and disinfect all shared areas daily.

- Create a system to ensure scheduled cleaning.
- Clean frequently touched surfaces often.
- Follow the cleaning product instructions, including wearing the appropriate protective equipment and using the correct concentration of the product.

Modify workspaces and activities to allow for social distancing.

- Don't share work equipment.
- Cancel unnecessary meetings and trainings or do them remotely if possible.

Inform your staff and residents.

Educate and encourage everyone to take these everyday precautions.

- Stay home as much as possible, practice social distancing and wear a [cloth face covering](#) when you need to leave home.
- Encourage using the stairs instead of the elevator, if possible to do so.
- Avoid gathering in common areas.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Wash your hands just before leaving your apartment and just upon entering.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Cover your coughs and sneezes with your sleeve or a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash and wash your hands.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaning spray or wipe.

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Always wash your hands if your hands are visibly dirty.
- Advise staff and residents to visit healthvermont.gov/COVID-19 or call 2-1-1 if they have questions about COVID-19.
- Share handouts about COVID-19 prevention and symptoms (see resources below).

Actively support employees to reduce transmission.

- Encourage sick employees to stay home.
- If employees must be on site, encourage the use of cloth face coverings.
- Send employees home who come to work sick.
- Offer flexible leave policies (non-punitive emergency sick leave, leave for sick family members or childcare).
- Don't require proof (e.g. medical note) of COVID-19-related sick time or to return to work.
- Make sure hygiene and personal protective supplies are available, such as gloves, soap, water, and hand sanitizer where handwashing is not available.
- Communicate to employees that if they are well but share a home with someone with COVID-19, they should notify their supervisor and contact the Health Department.

Support residents who may have stress, anxiety or feel isolated.

- Use phone or online tools to keep people connected.
- Help residents plan for the support they need.

The Health Department's Role

The Vermont Health Department is here to help. We will:

- answer questions about infection control
- respond to questions from residents regarding public health concerns
- provide guidance to help you prevent infections in your facility
- be a subject matter resource
- provide public health guidance

If a resident or staff member tests positive – While protecting the identity of the person, the Health Department will contact the property owner or manager, conduct a remote assessment of the situation, and provide additional guidance and recommendations about infection control.

The Health Department will also follow up with close contacts of positive cases and provide guidance to the individuals. The Agency of Human Services will also work with the property owner to

assess services and supports needed by the facility and will reach out to residents to help get needs met (for example, pharmacy delivery of medications).

Additional Resources

[Print materials](#) (CDC)

[Using Cloth Face Coverings to Help Slow the Spread of COVID-19](#)

[Retirement Community Response](#) (CDC)

[Guidance for Businesses](#) (CDC)

[Cleaning and Disinfection for Community Facilities](#) (CDC)

[List of Disinfectants for Use Against COVID-19](#) (EPA)

[Stress and Coping](#) (CDC)

[What to do if you are a close contact of someone who is diagnosed with COVID-19](#)