



March 12, 2021

**Re: Visitation Guidance from San Mateo County Health Related to AFL 20-22-6 issued March 8, 2021 by the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) and Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) guidance QSO-20-39-NH revised March 10, 2021**

Dear Long-Term Care Facility Director:

Long-term care facilities remain at risk for severe COVID-19 outbreaks due to their congregate nature and the vulnerable population they care for, (e.g., older adults with multiple co-morbidities). Ill healthcare workers (HCWs) or visitors are the most likely sources of introduction of COVID-19 into the facility.

On March 8, 2021, CDPH issued an updated All Facilities Letter ([AFL 20-22.6](#)) for long term care facilities giving updated visitation guidance from CMS ([QSO-20-39-NH](#)) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The update revises CDPH's previous visitation guidance, including expanded opportunities for indoor, in-room visitation and physical touch, and infection control measures for fully vaccinated residents and visitors. This AFL supersedes the guidance provided in AFL 20-22.5.

**As a result, Dr. Morrow has rescinded the Health Officer Order issued on 10/29/2020. While we agree in general with the approach taken by CDPH and CMS, to protect this fragile population we are suggesting that ALL long-term care facilities take a more conservative approach to visitation than what is outlined in the revised AFL and CMS guidance. This letter serves to outline San Mateo County Health's recommendations for a gradual and cautious lifting of the restrictions.**

- We recommend against allowing visits if the facility is experiencing an outbreak.
- It may be prudent to limit visitations if residents are housed in the yellow zone (exposed or on observation status), especially if the resident and/or the resident's visitor has not been vaccinated. If visitation is allowed while residents are in quarantine, we encourage holding visits outdoors, weather permitting. Avoid transporting the resident through the green zone. As always, there should be no restriction for residents receiving compassionate care. Full personal protective equipment (PPE) should be worn by the visitor(s) for all visits to residents housed in the yellow unit, whether they occur indoors or outdoors.
- As per AFL 20-22.6, "Visitors in Tier 1 (Purple) counties for fully vaccinated residents must test negative on a POC antigen or PCR test on a sample taken within the prior two days, regardless of the visitor's vaccination status. Facilities may offer POC antigen testing. Fully vaccinated visitors of fully vaccinated residents may have brief, limited





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physical contact with the resident (e.g., a brief hug, holding hands, assisting with feeding or grooming).” Testing could be considered even when San Mateo County is in a non-Purple tier (e.g., Red, Orange, Yellow).

- Consider asking visitors who report being vaccinated against COVID-19 and therefore are eligible for brief, limited physical contact with the resident, to submit documentation of vaccination status. We recommend including this check-off on sign-in sheets.
- We caution facilities on the use of multi-purpose rooms (e.g., a dining room or cafeteria) for visitation purposes, as it increases the risk of exposure when multiple residents and their visitors gather in one space. We recommend scheduling visits to limit the number of visitors in the facility at the same time. Ideally, visitation should occur in dedicated spaces that are only used for the purpose of visitation.
- Consider limiting the duration of visits. Data shows that prolonged exposure increases the risk of transmission.
- Facilities should consider defining small groups or pods of residents that consistently participate in communal dining together to minimize the number of people exposed if one or more of the residents is later identified as being COVID-19 positive. The decision on the number of residents per table should be based on the size of the dining room. Residents should be seated a minimum of 6 feet apart. We recommend against allowing dining with visitors.
- While it is reasonable to resume group activities, we recommend against activities such as singing (e.g., choir practice or sing-a-longs) or dancing with a partner as this increases the risk of exposure to respiratory droplets.
- We recommend against having un-vaccinated, non-essential personnel/contractors (e.g., barbers, manicurists/pedicurists) enter the facility. If they must enter the facility and provide services to residents, then we recommend it be performed in appropriate spaces (outdoors, if feasible, or indoors in a well-ventilated area where at least 6-ft distancing can be maintained between residents).
- Encourage unvaccinated, non-essential personnel/contractors who enter the facility to seek COVID-19 vaccination through the resources available in their community.

Thank you for working with us to keep your residents safe and healthy.

Sincerely,

\_\_signed\_\_

Scott Morrow, MD, MPH, MBA  
San Mateo County Health Officer