



July 20, 2021

Dear Family Member,

On July 8th, the Department of Health (DOH) released updated nursing home visitation and social interaction guidance that aligns with Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance and clarifies certain issues that have been subject to various interpretations by regional office personnel.

Key Changes

Key elements of the new guidance that differ from prior guidance are:

- If both the resident and their visitor(s) are fully vaccinated, and the resident and visitor(s) are alone in the resident room or designated visitation room, the resident and visitor may choose to have close contact (including touch) without a mask or face covering.
- In an outbreak, only indoor visitation is suspended.
- Residents who are on transmission-based precautions (TBP) for confirmed or suspected COVID-19 or an exposure to COVID-19 as defined by the CDC should only receive visits that are virtual, through windows, or in person for compassionate care situations. However, residents who are placed on TBP only because they live on a unit where an infected resident or staff member lives or works, but who have not been exposed as defined by the CDC, may receive visitors outdoors.
- Communal dining may occur without the use of face coverings or physical distancing if all residents are fully vaccinated. If there are unvaccinated residents also dining in the communal dining area, all residents must wear face coverings when not eating, and unvaccinated residents should physically distance from others.
- Group activities may occur without the use of face coverings or social distancing if all residents participating are fully vaccinated. If any residents who are not fully vaccinated are participating, all residents must wear a face covering, and unvaccinated residents should physically distance from others.

Furthermore, there have been some changes to the requirements for staff testing. Employees who are fully vaccinated are no longer required to be tested. Unvaccinated staff will be required to be tested once a month. In the event a positive COVID case is identified in the facility, all staff and residents will receive regular testing until the outbreak is considered over.

Given some of these changes, we are attempting to be more accommodating with our visitation. We have revised our Visitor Response Plan to allow you to visit without having to make an appointment. You can find the updated policy on our website at www.oneidahealth.org. Please note that we will still only allow visitors during visitor hours. This may be a challenge to us as we will only allow visitors in the building and to the nursing units if we have the physical space for the visit, therefore we ask for your cooperation. We will continue to limit visits to 30 minutes if there are other families waiting to visit. We do have several areas on each floor that may be used. If there are no areas on the floor for your visit, we will try to accommodate your visit outside or in the sunroom or community dining room. Visitors are still required to be screened prior to the visit and are encouraged to be COVID tested prior to your visit. We also encourage you to present your vaccination card at the time of your visit for verification purposes only. Please be patient with the process and respectful of our staff. If this process is not received well, we may resort back to requiring a pre-scheduled visit.

Thank you for your cooperation and understanding.

Sincerely,

Fortunato Scerbo III

Administrator