

STATE OF CONNECTICUT

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Making Nursing Home Visitation Safe During the COVID-19 Pandemic (January 21, 2022)

In addition to this guidance pertaining to visitation in nursing homes, **nursing homes should carefully read the following documents in their entirety when establishing and updating policies and procedures for visitation:**

1. The regulatory framework for nursing home visitation outlined in CMS' [revised QSO 20-39](#).
2. CMS' updated [Nursing Home Visitation FAQs](#).
3. CDC guidance for planning visitation: [infection control guidance for nursing homes](#).
4. CMS' infographic that nursing homes can use to help communicate safe visitation practices with residents and visitors. Access the infographic [here](#).
5. Governor Lamont's [Executive Order 14F](#), effective Saturday, January 22, 2022.

General Principles

- Risk of COVID-19 infection introduction during visitation increases when visitors and essential support persons¹ are not up to date with COVID-19 vaccination, when core principles of infection control are not followed, and when [community transmission levels](#) are substantial to high.
- Nursing homes should inform visitors and essential support persons about the importance of getting vaccinated and boosted, the recommendations for source control (masking) and physical distancing, and the policies for not visiting if they have any of the following:
 - Active COVID-19 infection
 - Symptoms of COVID-19
 - Meet criteria for [quarantine](#)
 - Refuse to take a rapid antigen test provided by the nursing home per EO 14F (see below)
- [Alternatives to indoor visitation](#) should be offered, and outdoor visitation should be encouraged as weather allows.
- Pursuant to Executive Order 14F, all nursing homes shall require visitors and essential support persons prior to visiting a nursing home resident to either be fully vaccinated against COVID-19, including a booster, if eligible, or to show evidence of a negative COVID-19 test. See section below titled, "Vaccination and Testing for Visitors and Essential Support Persons: Implementation Guidance for EO 14F."

¹ When used in this guidance, "essential support persons" shall include primary and secondary essential support persons as defined in Public Act 21-71.



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Masking of Visitors and Essential Support Persons

Wearing masks have been shown to reduce transmission of COVID-19.

- Visitors and essential support persons should wear [well-fitting masks with good filtration](#). Procedure (medical or surgical) masks and respirators (N95, KF94, and KN95) are preferred over cloth face coverings.
- When visitors and essential support persons are screened for any of the conditions above (see “General Principles”), they should also be screened for appropriate mask wearing and instructed to adjust or replace their masks if inadequate or poorly-fitting.

During substantial to high community transmission levels.

- QSO 20-39 states: “If the nursing home’s county COVID-19 community level of transmission is substantial to high, all residents and visitors, regardless of vaccination status, should wear face coverings or masks and physically distance, at all times.”
- Masks are to be worn at all times in both communal settings and patient rooms. Removing masks for eating in the room with a resident should not be allowed.

During outbreak investigations

During an outbreak investigation (a [facility-onset resident case](#) or a staff case within the past 14 days):

- Visitors and essential support persons should be counseled about their potential to be exposed to COVID-19 in the facility.
- Visitors and essential support persons should wear masks during visits, regardless of vaccination status, and visits should ideally occur in the resident’s room.
- Residents should also wear face coverings whenever in close contact with others, regardless of vaccination status, even with visitors and essential support persons who are up to date² with vaccinations.

Vaccination and Testing for Visitors and Essential Support Persons: Implementation Guidance for EO 14F

Visitors, essential support persons, residents, and their representatives should be made aware of the risks associated with visitation, and the infection mitigation measures for COVID-19. Vaccination (being up to date with COVID-19 vaccination) and pre-visit testing are two measures visitors and essential support persons can take to reduce the risk of infecting the residents they visit

Pursuant to Executive Order 14F, all nursing homes shall require visitors or primary or secondary essential support persons prior to visiting a nursing home resident to either:

² Being “up to date” with COVID-19 vaccination means a person has received all CDC-recommended COVID-19 vaccines, including any booster dose(s) when eligible. The latest recommendations can be found here: [Stay Up to Date with Your Vaccines | CDC](#)

- provide proof that they are fully vaccinated against COVID-19 and, if eligible under CDC guidance, have received a COVID-19 vaccine booster; **or**
- provide paper or electronic proof of a negative COVID-19 test result from either:
 - a rapid antigen test completed within the previous forty-eight (48) hours; **or**
 - a polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test completed within the previous seventy-two (72) hours; **or**
- take a rapid antigen test at the nursing home in a form and manner as directed by the Department of Public Health (“DPH”). **A nursing home shall NOT deny entrance to any visitor or primary or secondary essential support person who is willing to take a rapid antigen test but is unable to because the nursing home is not able to provide a rapid antigen test.**

In addition, if a nursing home is in possession of rapid antigen tests that are not otherwise designated for use by the facility to comply with state or federal regulatory testing requirements of the facility’s staff, the nursing home shall make the rapid antigen test available to visitors and essential support persons who do not meet the requirements of vaccination or who do not provide a documented negative COVID-19 test.

Proof of Vaccination Status: The [CDC COVID-19 vaccination record card](#), a healthcare provider’s portal record (such as [EPIC MyChart](#)), a [VAMs certificate](#), and a [CT Wiz official immunization record](#) are all acceptable forms of proof of COVID-19 vaccination. The [CT Wiz Public Portal](#) allows individuals who were vaccinated in Connecticut to access their own immunization records with the option of getting a PDF copy of their full immunization record, or their COVID-19 vaccine record with a SMART Health card (a digital copy of your COVID-19 vaccine record that can be stored on your phone as a QR code).

- [SMART Health Cards](#) are acceptable forms of proof of COVID-19 vaccination available via EPIC MyChart and the CT Wiz Public Portal.
- Visitors and essential support persons presenting CDC COVID-19 vaccination record cards do not need to sign declarations attesting to the validity of the cards.
- CT DPH does not issue replacement CDC COVID-19 Vaccination Cards to the public.
- Visitors and essential support persons can learn more about obtaining proof of vaccination [here](#).
- Proof of vaccination must include:
 1. Personal identifiers (full name plus at least one other identifier such as date of birth) that match personal identifiers on a personal identification card/document; AND
 2. The name of the official source issuing the record (e.g., public health agency, government agency, or other authorized vaccine provider); AND
 3. Vaccination type(s) and vaccination date(s).

Proof of Negative COVID-19 Test. Proof of negative COVID-19 test must be in the form of written documentation (paper or digital copy) and must indicate:

1. Type of test (NAAT or antigen, including self-tests with integrated digital documentation)
2. Entity issuing the result (e.g., laboratory, healthcare entity, or telehealth service)
3. Sample collection date/time (must show the sample was taken no more than 48 hours prior to arrival for visitation)
4. Information that identifies the visitor or essential support person (full name plus at least one other identifier such as date of birth)
5. Negative test result indicating no detection of COVID-19

Self-testing. Visitors or essential support persons who lack proof of being fully vaccinated for COVID-19, including a booster dose, if eligible, or who lack proof of a negative COVID-19 test within the parameters set forth above, may take a rapid COVID-19 test at the nursing home.

- The state will distribute to nursing homes an initial round of self-test kits for use only by visitors and essential support persons to facilitate visitation and provide access to the resident.
- Visitors and essential support persons should be directed to conduct their self-tests outside the building if possible, or in an area away from others where they can safely remove their mask for specimen collection to maintain infection control. Self-tests should be performed and interpreted (“read”) by the visitor or essential support person. The visitor or essential support person should be provided with the manufacturer’s instructions for self-testing, along with the self-test kit. Self-tests are authorized to be interpreted by the individual using the test rather than a healthcare provider. After the visitor or essential support person interprets their self-test, the nursing home should ask to see the test device as proof of a negative test. If the visitor or essential support person refuses to show proof of a negative test, the nursing facility may deem the test positive for COVID-19 and deny entrance to the facility.
- Nursing home staff are not required to observe the administration of the self-test, though nursing homes may choose to do so.
- The nursing facility shall document the total number of visitors and essential support persons each week and the total number of test kits provided to visitors and essential support persons each week.
- Nursing facilities shall provide this information to DPH upon request. Nursing facilities do not need to provide names or dates of visitation, only the total numbers.
- More information about self-testing can be found on [CDC’s self-testing website](#) and [Connecticut’s website about self-test kits](#).

Visitation Restrictions. Physical separation from family and other loved ones can take significant physical and emotional toll on residents and their loved ones. The requirements set forth in EO 14F are meant to make visitation as safe as possible for all residents, family, and staff, without unreasonably restricting visitation. EO 14F is intended to be consistent with CMS requirements set forth in [revised QSO 20-39](#), which advises that nursing homes should not restrict visitation “without a reasonable clinical or safety cause, consistent with 42 CFR § 483.10(f)(4)(v).”

In addition, the Core Principles set forth in [revised QSO 20-39](#) direct that “[v]isitors who have a positive viral test for COVID-19, symptoms of COVID-19, or currently meet the criteria for quarantine, should not enter the facility.” To that end, EO 14F provides that a nursing home shall deny entrance to any visitor or essential support person that tests positive for COVID-19. EO 14F also provides that nursing homes shall deny entrance to any visitor or essential support person who refuses to take a rapid antigen test provided by the nursing home; *however*, a nursing home shall NOT deny entrance to any visitor or essential support person who is willing to take a rapid antigen test but is unable to because the nursing home is not able to provide a rapid antigen test.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Does this guidance apply to assisted living facilities and other settings?

- EO 14F applies only to nursing homes subject to visitation requirements outlined in CMS' [revised QSO 20-39](#).
- Other facility types may voluntarily adopt this guidance while keeping in mind the unique circumstances of each facility's residents and visitors subject to any law governing residents' rights regarding visitation.

2. Where can visitors and essential support persons get tested prior to arrival?

- COVID-19 testing sites throughout Connecticut can be found at [2-1-1 Connecticut \(211ct.org\)](#)
- [Free of Cost COVID Testing Sites \(ct.gov\)](#): appointments are encouraged, but walk-up testing is available.

3. Can self-tests that visitors and essential support persons conduct at home prior to arrival fulfill the testing requirement?

Only proctored self-tests that meet the following criteria are acceptable:

- COVID-19 viral test (nucleic acid amplification test [NAAT] or antigen test) with Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA)
- Testing procedure must include a telehealth service affiliated with the manufacturer of the test that provides real-time supervision remotely.
- The telehealth provider must confirm your identity, observe sample collection and testing procedures, confirm the test result, and issue a report that meets the requirements outlined under "Proof of Negative COVID-19 test" above.

These criteria reflect the criteria established by CDC for [testing prior to air travel](#) to the United States.

4. What information must be included in the test result?

1. Type of test (NAAT or antigen, including self-tests with integrated digital documentation)
2. Entity issuing the result (e.g., laboratory, healthcare entity, or telehealth service)
3. Sample collection date/time (must show the sample was taken no more than 48 hours prior to arrival)
4. Information that identifies the visitor or essential support person (full name plus at least one other identifier such as date of birth)
5. Negative test result indicating no detection of COVID-19

These criteria reflect the criteria established by CDC for [testing prior to air travel](#) to the United States.

5. What if a visitor or essential support person does not show any proof of vaccination or proof of negative COVID-19 testing and refuses to self-test prior to visitation?

- Per EO 14F, nursing homes should deny entrance to visitors and essential support persons who refuse to take a self-test provided by the nursing home; HOWEVER, nursing homes should NOT deny entrance to visitors or essential support persons who are willing to take self-test but are unable to because the nursing home is not able to provide a self-test.
- When visits are allowed due to the unavailability of test kits at the nursing home consider enhanced vigilance with other layers of protection such as source control (fit and mask type) and physical distancing.

- 6. What if a visitor or essential support person does not show any proof of vaccination or proof of negative COVID-19 testing and refuses to self-test prior to visitation, and the visit is a compassionate care visit?**
- Nursing homes should facilitate compassionate care visits consistent with CMS requirements and guidelines.
- 7. What happens if a visitor or essential support person needs to take a self-test and that self-test results positive?**
- Visitors and essential support persons who test positive by the self-test should be instructed not to return to the facility if their self-test is positive.
 - Individuals who test positive should not enter the nursing home for at least 10 days and they meet criteria for ending [isolation](#). CDC recommends to “avoid people who are immunocompromised or at high risk for severe disease, and nursing homes and other high-risk settings, until after at least 10 days.”
- 8. When a visitor or an essential support person tests positive, does the nursing home need to report the positive result to DPH?**
- No, reporting of self-test results to public health authorities is not required under the FDA EUA for these tests.
 - When nursing homes provide self-tests to visitors or essential support persons, they are not administering the test as a point-of-care test under the facility’s CLIA Certificate of Waiver. Therefore, the facility is not responsible for interpretation and reporting of the test result.
 - When a visitor or essential support person tests positive upon self-testing before entry, the visitor or essential support person should not be allowed to proceed with visitation.
- 9. How does verification of self-test results occur?**
- When a visitor or essential support person is offered a self-test option at the nursing home, the visitor or essential support person should be provided instructions on how to administer the self-test and directed to an area where they can safely perform the self-test if there is not an adequate space outside the facility.
 - When the self-test result is ready to be read, the visitor or essential support person must read and interpret the test result themselves.
 - Nursing home staff are not required to observe the administration of the self-test, though nursing homes may choose to do so.
 - The visitor or essential support person must show the self-test device as proof of a negative self-test result. If the visitor or essential support person refuses to show proof of a negative test, the nursing facility may deem the test positive for COVID-19 and deny entrance to the facility.
- 10. Can nursing homes ask visitors or essential support persons to self-test if they are fully vaccinated (completed primary vaccine series) but not up to date with COVID-19 vaccination boosters?**
- Yes, visitors and essential support persons who are fully vaccinated but not up to date with COVID-19 vaccination boosters *must* be asked to provide a negative COVID-19 test within the time periods set forth in EO 14F.

- If a visitor or essential support person is fully vaccinated but not boosted and does not provide proof of a negative COVID-19 test, they *must* be asked to conduct a self-test at the nursing home if self-tests are available.
- If the nursing home does not have a self-test available, the nursing home must allow visitation to proceed. The nursing home should consider enhanced vigilance with other layers of protection such as source control (fit and mask type) and physical distancing.

11. Can nursing homes use the self-test kits provided by the state for visitors and essential support persons who are fully vaccinated and boosted or who present a documented negative test result within the timeframes set forth in the EO?

- No. Due to the limited availability of self-testing kits, nursing homes should prioritize kits supplied by the state for screening in accordance with the EO.

12. How do nursing homes verify that a visitor or essential support person is fully vaccinated, including a COVID-19 booster, if eligible?

- Acceptable forms of proof of COVID-19 vaccination and information required are indicated under “Proof of Vaccination Status” in the guidance above.

13. Does vaccination and testing verification need to occur before each visit, particularly for frequent visitors and essential support persons?

- Nursing homes should check visitors and essential support persons for compliance with the Order at each visit. Nursing homes may choose to keep on file visitor and essential support person vaccination and testing verification to expedite entry for visitors and essential support persons who are up to date with COVID-19 vaccination and those who visit again within the testing timeframes set forth in EO 14F for a negative COVID-19 test: a rapid antigen test completed within the previous forty-eight (48) hours; or a polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test completed within the previous seventy-two (72) hours.
- Visitors and essential support persons with verification of vaccination records and testing results on file must still undergo screening for symptoms, active COVID-19 infection, need for quarantine, and a well-fitting mask.
- Visitors and essential support persons who are up to date with COVID-19 vaccination do not need to have vaccination status re-verified unless COVID-19 booster recommendations change.
- Visitors and essential support persons who are not up to date with COVID-19 vaccination who submit their negative COVID-19 test result do not need to present another test result until either 48 hours after the sample collection time for an antigen test or 72 hours after the sample collection time for a PCR test.

14. Where can visitors and essential support persons safely conduct self-testing if they need to do one before visitation?

- Nursing homes should have a plan for instructing visitors and essential support persons to self-test if they do not present proof of a negative COVID-19 test within the timeframes set forth in EO 14F and are not fully vaccinated with COVID-19 vaccination, including a booster, if eligible.
- Facilities may ask visitors and essential support persons to conduct testing in their personal vehicles; however, there should also be a place appropriately distanced to maintain infection control for visitors and essential support persons to self-swab and conduct self-testing.

- Self-testing should occur in a location away from areas where residents frequent.

15. What if the visitor or essential support person recently recovered from COVID-19?

- EO 14F applies to visitors and essential support persons who recently recovered from COVID-19. If they are not fully vaccinated for COVID-19, including a booster, if eligible, they should provide proof of a negative COVID-19 test as set forth in EO 14F or be offered self-testing at the nursing home.
- Antigen tests (which include self-tests) are the recommended test type for individuals who recently recovered from COVID-19.

16. Are children subject to the EO if they are not yet eligible for vaccination or boosters?

- Yes, children who are not yet eligible for vaccination or boosters should bring proof of a negative test or be offered a self-test at the nursing home. The state is providing iHealth self-tests which can be used for children as young as 2 years old. If appropriate testing is not available based on the child's age (e.g., an infant), then visitation should proceed as if the nursing home does not have self-kits available and consistent with CMS requirements.

17. The iHealth self-test kits provided by the state come two to a box. Are nursing homes required to give a whole box to each visitor or essential support person or can the nursing home staff open the box and give one test per person?

- To preserve supply, the nursing home should distribute only one test per visitor or essential support person who is unable to show proof of vaccination and booster, if eligible, or who cannot provide documentation of a PCR test or antigen test taken in the time frame set forth in the EO.

18. The supply of self-test kits is limited. How should nursing homes preserve their limited supply of test kits?

There are several ways to preserve the allocated supply:

- Nursing home administrators should communicate with family members to let them know they should bring and provide proof of vaccination as a condition of visitation.
- Nursing homes may ask visitors and essential support persons who have been recently PCR tested for COVID-19 to bring evidence of those results.
- Test kits should only be used for visitors and essential support persons who are unable to show proof of vaccination and booster, if eligible, or who cannot provide documentation of a PCR test or antigen test taken in the time frame set forth in the EO.
- Nursing homes should distribute only one test per visitor or essential support person who is unable to show proof of vaccination and booster, if eligible, or who cannot provide documentation of a PCR test or antigen test taken in the time frame set forth in the EO.

19. If a nursing home runs out of test kits, will more be made available by DPH?

- DPH will be seeking additional test kit supplies for allocation to nursing homes, but the supply will be limited. In the upcoming weeks, the DPH Submissions Portal will include a means for ordering test kits. Nursing homes should enter their request for additional test kits prior to running out of supply. Nursing homes will be asked to pick up the test kits in Hartford at the DPH offices.

- As a condition of receiving additional supplies, nursing homes will be asked to provide documentation setting forth the total number of visitors and essential support persons each week and the total number of test kits provided to visitors and essential support persons each week for all weeks beginning January 22, 2022. Nursing facilities do not need to provide names or dates of visitation, only the total numbers.
- All members of the public are eligible to order free test kits from federal government that can be performed prior to arrival at the nursing home: [COVID Home Tests | USPS](#).