

Infection Control Practices at Nursing Homes & My Loved Ones



NURSING HOMES

There are many things to think about when selecting a nursing home for your loved one.

More than ever, the COVID-19 pandemic highlights the importance of excellent infection control practices within our health care settings. We all want to make sure our loved ones are receiving needed healthcare without the risk of acquiring an infection in their new home.

Nursing Home Compare

Accessing the government's Nursing Home Compare site is a good first step. You can compare up to three homes at one time:

- **Link:** <https://www.medicare.gov/nursinghomecompare/search.html>
- **To Use:** Search for the nursing home you would like to review. Click on the name of the nursing home in your search. If there is a Health Inspection Report, click on the link and review the results. If there are any infection control issues, they will be documented in this report. This report may also reveal other issues.

Questions to Ask

If you are considering a home that is in the middle of an infection outbreak, you may not be able to visit and take a tour. Regardless, these are good questions to ask of facilities:

- Do you provide new employees with infection control (IC) training? Who provides the training?
- Do you have an Infection Control Professional on staff or access to one within your corporation or organization?
- How often do your staff get ongoing training on IC practices?
- How is the training conducted? Is it on their own by reading IC information, policies and procedures? Is it completed through observation of the educator and required teach-back?
- How often is staff observed and assessed for proper IC practices? Who is responsible for this assessment?
- Does your building have an adequate supply of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and how is that determined?
- Is your staff trained on the proper use of PPE and how often is this training done?
- Does the facility have the ability to do infectious disease testing? If not, is there a contract with a reference laboratory for performing rushed testing in order to determine if staff or residents are infected? If not, how do you determine if a resident or employee has an infectious disease?
- What are your policy and procedures when a resident or an employee is identified as having an infectious disease? How often are the policies updated? Can I see them?
- Does the facility have a room or wing to separate infected residents or employees?

- What are your policy and procedures when an epidemic is declared and how soon are elevated infection protocols enacted?
- How do you keep families informed about the status of any cases at your facility?
- What action is taken if a staff member has an infectious disease? Are they sent home? When is it safe for them to return to work? If an infectious disease is identified in residents or employees, are staff provided with masks and required to wear them?
- Do you do laundry on site or will I be responsible for my family member's clothes? If I am responsible, what is the policy for returning them to the facility?
- If laundry is on site, how is that done differently during an infection outbreak?
- How does an outbreak affect gathering together for dining?
- How do you keep the residents active and socially engaged when there is a need for physical distancing or when they have to be restricted to their rooms?
- What is your policy for visitors during an outbreak and how do you help the residents maintain contact with their families, friends, or their spiritual support?
- If visitors are not allowed, can staff provide short FaceTime (or equivalent, e.g., WhatsApp) smartphone meetings between residents and their families to maintain personal contact?
- Are there physical locations (e.g. windows) that a staff member can take a resident to enable visual contact with or without phone audio or video?
- Is Telehealth technology available for healthcare visits?
- How do you ensure there will be enough staff to meet the needs of the residents during an outbreak?
- Are staff required to have an annual flu shot and be up-to-date on other immunizations? How do you document that this has been done?
- If my loved one needs therapy or other specialized services, how do you ensure these continue to be provided? What about other services, such as salon for hair and nails?

You will want to ask additional, specific questions if there are any IC issues documented in the Health Inspection Report for the home you are considering.

- Number and placement of hand sanitizers
- Staff use of hand sanitizer
- Staff handwashing practices – do they wash their hands for at least 20 seconds with the proper technique? How do you monitor this is done correctly?
- A Visitor sign-in/sign-out book: Are ALL visitors REQUIRED to sign in and out, including time, so contacts can be identified and appropriately tested and monitored if an infectious disease occurs?

If these questions are not answered to your satisfaction and/or or you have concerns about what you see during a tour, ask for the name and contact information of the respondent's supervisor or contact your local Ombudsman.