

Nursing Home Visitor Restrictions During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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May 6, 2020 | 2020-R-0140

Issue

Summarize the governor's COVID-19 executive orders (EO) concerning visitor access to nursing homes.

Summary

In March, the governor issued an executive order authorizing the Department of Public Health (DPH) commissioner to restrict entrance into nursing homes, residential care homes, or chronic disease hospitals that she deems necessary to protect the health and welfare of facility residents, patients, and staff ([EO 7](#), § 2, Mar. 12, 2020; [EO 7A](#), Mar. 13, 2020).

Since then, DPH issued two implementation orders that ban all visitors to these facilities with limited exceptions (e.g., first responders and certain family members). The first order specifies visitors exempt from the ban, procedures for screening potential visitors, and conditions under which facility residents may leave the facility grounds ([DPH Implementation Order](#), Mar. 13, 2020).

These visitor restrictions were initially effective for 30 days, however the department issued a second order in April extending the restrictions through the duration of the declared public health and civil preparedness emergencies ([DPH Implementation Order](#), Apr. 21, 2020).

Exceptions to Visitor Restrictions

Under the DPH order, all visitors are banned from nursing homes, residential care homes, and

chronic disease hospitals, except for the following individuals:

1. first responders, including emergency medical services, law enforcement, firefighters, and emergency management personnel;
2. family members, domestic partners, or other people the patient designates only when the facility's medical director, a licensed physician, or an advanced practice registered nurse (APRN) determines the patient is at the end stage of life and death is imminent;
3. any person authorized by law to oversee or investigate the care and services provided by the facility; and
4. service providers who are required to do maintenance or repair that is necessary without delay for the facility's continued operation ([DPH Implementation Order](#), Mar. 13, 2020).

COVID-19 Risk Screenings

Before the above listed visitors are allowed to enter the facility, facility personnel must first perform a COVID-19 risk screening for each visitor and, if necessary, use appropriate personal protective equipment in accordance with federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines.

Under the DPH order, the risk screening must include the visitor's recent travel history, contact with a person who has a presumed or confirmed COVID-19 infection, recent air travel, and physical symptoms (i.e., fever over 100 degrees, coughing, sneezing, shortness of breath, or sore throat). The facility must ban a visitor who meets any one of these risk factors ([DPH Implementation Order](#), Mar. 13, 2020).

Resident Communications

The DPH order specifies that it does not suspend or modify a resident's right under existing law to communicate privately with a person of his or her choosing, send and receive personal mail unopened, and make or receive private telephone calls, unless it is medically contraindicated and a physician or APRN documents it in the patient's medical record ([CGS § 19a-550\(b\)\(12\); DPH Implementation Order](#), Mar. 13, 2020).

Residents Leaving Facility Grounds

Under the DPH order, facility residents who are capable of leaving the facility may do so at any time provided they are screened for COVID-19 exposure upon return to the facility, as described above ([DPH Implementation Order](#), Mar. 13, 2020).

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