

Frequently Asked Questions

Where can I find the most up-to-date information on COVID-19?

For a complete and updated list of Centers for Medicare and Medicaid (CMS) actions in response to COVID-19, and other information specific to CMS, please visit :

www.coronavirus.gov

For information specific to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), please visit:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>

For information specific to the St. Louis Pandemic Taskforce, please visit:

https://www.facebook.com/coronavirus_info/?page_source=bookmark

For Information specific to St. Louis City Health Department, please visit:

<https://www.stlouis-mo.gov/government/departments/health/>

What has CMS released related to testing?

CMS has provided recommendations to state and local officials to help determine the level of mitigation required to continue preventing the spread of COVID-19 in skilled nursing and intermediate care, and in some cases, assisted living.

The St. Louis Altenheim is completing testing on all units, including certified licensed skilled nursing, the licensed skilled nursing and intermediate care, the licensed assisted living memory care and the unlicensed senior living independent floor.

What steps should nursing homes, such as the St. Louis Altenheim, take before reopening to visitors?

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid (CMS) has recommended that nursing homes continue to follow the CDC guidance for preventing the transmission of COVID-19. In addition, they recommend following state and local direction. Because residents in long term care or senior living facilities are especially vulnerable, CMS does not recommend opening facilities to visitors (except for compassionate care situations) until phase three. CMS defines phase three as occurring when:

- there have been no new onset COVID-19 cases in the facility for 28 days
- the facility is not experiencing staff shortages
 - the Altenheim has not experienced staff shortages. Staffing has been maintained at 3.0-3.8 hours per resident day with at least 1 licensed nurse onsite 24/7
- the nursing home has adequate supplies of personal protective equipment and essential cleaning and disinfection supplies to care for residents
 - please be assured that PPE has been available and provided as recommended by the CDC throughout this pandemic, as a result of generous donations from the Board of Directors, family members and churches. FEMA/SEMA and MO DHHS 14-day PPE supplies arrived the last week of May
- the nursing home has adequate access to testing for COVID-19
 - Testing will be provided at the Altenheim to all floors regardless of level of care and/or services, and to all staff at the St. Louis Altenheim on June 1st through 3rd, and on-going, as recommended by the CDC and MO DHSS.
- Referral hospital(s) have bed capacity on wards and intensive care units
 - Referral hospitals for the Altenheim continue to be primarily Mercy South, St. Louis University Hospital, SSM St. Mary's and Barnes Hospital, all of which have capacity at this time and have not experienced any capacity issues throughout the pandemic.

Why are there additional criteria for reopening nursing homes when many states seem to be loosening restrictions on workplaces, business, stores, etc.?

Nursing homes and other places where seniors with chronic and other medical conditions, such as diabetes and COPD, live in apartment like settings, in close quarters, have been severely impacted by COVID-19. Outbreaks among seniors have caused higher rates of infection, medical complications and death at a much higher rate than among younger people not living in a healthcare setting.

The vulnerable nature of an elderly population with various chronic health conditions combined with the inherent risks of living in close proximity, in a healthcare setting, requires aggressive efforts to limit COVID-19 exposure and to try to prevent the spread of COVID-19 among the residents. Continuing to follow a no visitor policy, no-touch deliveries, wearing masks when 6-ft. social distancing is not possible and other criteria specific to a long-term care environment will help to ensure that residents remain safe

Why isn't CMS requiring testing in nursing homes?

The CMS Guidelines for Opening Up America Again can be found online at this link: <https://www.cms.gov/files/document/covid-flexibility-reopen-essential-non-covid-services.pdf> *These guidelines do call for testing and contact tracing.* Nursing home testing is a cornerstone of these guidelines and efforts.

The guidelines direct states to be prepared to provide testing resources first and foremost to nursing homes so that any potential outbreak of the coronavirus among the most vulnerable population can be monitored. Testing should be done proactively in nursing homes and everyone should be tested - this is the backbone of building a national coronavirus surveillance system.

Who will pay for the tests?

To aid in this effort and rapidly expand COVID-19 testing, CMS recently issued a ruling that Medicare will pay a rate of \$100 for certain laboratory tests that use high-throughput technologies to rapidly process large numbers of specimens for COVID-19 testing per day. On April 2, CMS issued a call to action for nursing homes and state and local governments urging leaders to work closely with nursing homes on access to testing and PPE.

The St. Louis Altenheim is working with Gamma lab services, the lab service provider for the facility to complete testing on all residents and all staff. Additionally, the Altenheim has worked with MO DHSS and Affinia Healthcare to assure testing of all staff and residents.

What is CMS doing to increase testing in nursing homes?

In the Guidelines for Opening Up America Again, testing is one of the Core State Preparedness Responsibilities. Specifically, nursing home testing is a cornerstone of these guidelines and efforts. The guidelines direct states to be prepared to deploy testing resources first and foremost to nursing homes to enable close monitoring of any potential outbreak of Coronavirus among this vulnerable population.

Additionally, the CMS issued a call to action for state and local governments that reinforced its infection control responsibilities and urged leaders to determine the local needs for COVID-19 testing, including making testing in nursing homes a priority.

Is COVID-19 testing required in nursing homes, or do nursing homes have to comply with family requests for testing of residents?

CMS and our partners on the White House Coronavirus Task Force are taking aggressive action to protect those most vulnerable to the 2019 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19). A dedicated Nursing Home Task Force, which includes CMS and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), meets daily with a singular focus of safeguarding the health of the elderly residing in nursing homes.

A decision to order a COVID-19 test for a patient is made by that patient's physician or health care provider. CMS continues to direct nursing homes to the latest guidance from the CDC on COVID-19 testing. In addition, nursing homes must follow any state or local requirements for COVID-19 screening, testing, and reporting. Ultimately, nursing homes are responsible for the health and safety of their residents.

For a full list of actions, visit CMS' Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) document:
<https://www.cms.gov/CCIIO/Resources/Fact-Sheets-and-FAQ>

When will visitors be allowed in nursing homes?

Continuing to restrict visitation is understandably challenging for families. Restricting visitors is necessary to protect residents from possible transmission of the virus. CMS is recommending that Nursing homes continue to restrict visitation in general based upon the following recommended guidelines:

- *Phase One:* Visitation is generally prohibited, with exceptions for compassionate care (end of life) situations
- *Phase Two:* Due to the elevated risk COVID-19 poses to the health of nursing home residents, visitation is still generally prohibited, except for compassionate care situations. In those limited situations, visitors are screened and additional precautions are taken, such as social distancing and hand hygiene (e.g., use alcohol-based hand rub upon entry). All visitors wear a cloth face covering or facemask for the duration of their visit.
- *Phase Three:* Visitation will be allowed with screening and additional precautions, including ensuring social distancing and hand hygiene (e.g., use alcohol-based hand rub upon entry). All visitors must wear a cloth face covering or facemask for the duration of their visit.

As more information about COVID-19 becomes available through the CDC, MO DHSS and the St. Louis City Department of Health, we will continue to update our practices and notify residents, friends and family of any changes as soon as reasonably possible. In the meantime, if you have any questions, please don't hesitate to reach out to the Director of Nursing, Janice Dickerson, the Administrator, Kelly Arnold, the Compliance and HIPPA Officer, Jean Bardwell, or any staff member, the Medical Director, Dr. Brosch and/or the Board of Directors.

