

THE RESIDENT ADVOCATE

A newsletter for long-term care residents containing news and information on rights, care issues, and updates on national policy.

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COVID-19: Stay Engaged

Throughout the world people are being affected by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), which is an infectious disease caused by a new virus. It can lead to respiratory illness with symptoms such as a cough, fever, and shortness of breath. This is an unprecedented time and we are all learning to cope and adjust together. To reduce the spread in nursing homes, the federal government has instituted some temporary changes, such as restricting who can come into the facility - only essential health care workers, and stopping communal dining and group activities. They are also allowing more flexibility in moving residents to different rooms and between facilities. While maintaining physical health is very important during this time, it is also necessary to maintain your mental health. Explore ways to stay connected to family and friends. Continue to express your needs to staff.

While there may be changes in your facility due to COVID-19, you still have the right to person-centered care. Below are tips for staying engaged and advocating for yourself to receive the care you deserve.

- **Stay Connected** - While restricting visitation and group gatherings is an added level of precaution meant to keep everyone safe, technology can be helpful to stay in touch and stay busy during this time. Ask your facility to provide access to Wi-Fi and devices such as cell phones, tablets, or computers to help you stay in touch with your family, Ombudsman, and online resources. Consider ways to keep the resident council going, such as by sending notes or talking on the phone to the resident council president, who can then convey issues and information to the designated staff person.
- **Communicate Your Needs** - Maintain as much of your normal routine as possible, including the care you receive. Talk with staff about getting fresh air and facilitating exercises that you can do in or out of bed depending on your abilities. You should still receive the assistance you need. Do not be afraid to ask for help. Staff are there for you.
- **Practice Good Hygiene** - Ask facility staff about the best ways to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 and other infections. Remind them to wash their hands often and cover their mouths when they cough. You can also ask your facility to post signs to encourage the same etiquette from others. It's okay to remind others to practice good hygiene.
- **Raise Concerns** – Speak up about care and rights violations with facility administration, staff, and with the long-term care ombudsman program. Find contact information for your ombudsman here: https://theconsumervoice.org/get_help.

Tips for Prevention



Take the same precautions to protect yourself from COVID-19 that you would from other viruses and infections.

- Wash your hands and avoid touching your face. While soap and water work best, hand sanitizers with at least 60% alcohol will also be effective.
- Distance yourself and limit interactions with others as much as possible. It is recommended to stay six feet away from others.
- Remind staff and others to wash their hands, cover their mouths when they cough, and frequently use disinfectant cleaners on surfaces.
- Ask the administrator about their infection control procedures and how they are working to prevent the spread of the virus. Ask that they inform all residents and families if the virus is found in the facility.

You may see an increase in the use of personal protective equipment such as facemasks, gloves, and gowns. This is to protect you and the staff from contracting or spreading the virus.

Staying Connected During Isolation

As we all are distancing ourselves, staying connected to each other can become more challenging. Below are creative ideas and practices for staying connected during this time of isolation.

- Send hand-written letters and cards.
- Use technology, such as video conferencing (Skype, FaceTime), Facebook, text messages, or email.
- “Visit” with friends and family through a window or glass door.
- Brainstorm ideas for maintaining regular activities while isolating like playing bingo by using call lights, conducting an exercise class via video chat, or playing individual games like bowling in the hallway.
- Think of creative ways to bring entertainers into the facility such as asking local musicians, magicians, or talented family members to perform outdoors, use the intercom system, or use video chat to perform.
- Use this time to watch your favorite movie, discover a new book, listen to an audio book, read a magazine, or work on an art project.
- Use free online resources to access opera and symphony performances; visit world-famous museums or libraries virtually; take a virtual walk through museums or watch webcams of sights like the zoo or the International Space Station.

Share love from a distance

Post a photo and share tips on how you're staying connected to loved ones. Use **#LoveFromADistance** on social media and tag us on Facebook: @theconsumervoice and Twitter: @ConsumerVoices. If you are not on social media and would like to participate, email info@theconsumervoice.org.

For more information and resources on supporting COVID-19 prevention in long-term facilities, visit <https://theconsumervoice.org/issues/other-issues-and-resources/covid-19>.



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