



COVID-19 Prevention Protocols Post-Vaccination

Congregate Care Settings

February 24, 2021

Many families of loved ones residing in congregate care settings have asked whether there will be changes to COVID-19 policies, in particular visitation, once residents are fully vaccinated.

Since July, families and friends have been able to visit their loved ones in congregate care settings, and beginning in October this has included indoor visitation if there has not been a positive resident or staff case in the past 14 days. The most updated visitation guidance for programs operated or overseen by the Executive Office of Health and Human Services is located [here](#). DPH and EOHHS agencies will continue to modify these policies gradually as more communities become fully vaccinated, and as we learn more from the CDC.

It is important to recognize that fully vaccinated individuals can still contract COVID-19 and spread the virus to others. COVID-19 safety protocols have helped contain infections dramatically since last March, and we want to prevent risk of the virus spreading, particularly given recent information about highly contagious new virus variants. You can find more information on the current number of COVID-19 cases and deaths in congregate care settings on the [weekly EOHHS COVID-19 Reporting dashboard](#) under “EOHHS State-Operated Facilities and Congregate Care Site Data”.

When will I be able to visit my loved one in a congregate care setting?

You may visit your loved one as long as there have not been any new cases for 14 days as detailed in [EOHHS Visitation Guidance during COVID-19](#). Visitation is critically important to a resident’s emotional well-being and quality of life, and we encourage you to visit if you are able. Regardless of the vaccination status of your loved one or others at the congregate care site, it is important to continue to adhere to COVID-19 safety protocols. As we all know, the virus can spread rapidly. Despite being vaccinated, residents may experience little or no symptoms, and inadvertently transmit the virus to visitors.

What else will change in congregate care settings after residents are vaccinated?

Isolation and quarantine precautions:

At this point, isolation and quarantine recommendations for staff and residents have not changed, even if the person has received one or two doses of the COVID-19 vaccine. This includes quarantine for staff and residents after an exposure, and residents after admission to congregate care setting.

COVID-19 Testing:

At this time, testing will continue as outlined in the [EOHHS Congregate Care Surveillance Testing Guidance](#), regardless of vaccination status for individual residents or staff in the congregate care site. This includes surveillance testing of all staff, testing of symptomatic staff and residents, as well as outbreak testing of residents and staff who are close contacts when a new COVID-19 case is identified.

Screening:

Screening residents, staff, and visitors for signs and symptoms of illness will continue as outlined in the [EOHHS Residential and Congregate Care Programs COVID-19 Guidance](#), even after residents and staff at the facility have been vaccinated. There have been no changes to recommendations for screening for signs and symptoms of COVID-19 in congregate care settings. No staff should work with fever or symptoms of acute illness, regardless of whether it is caused by COVID-19 or another illness.

Stop the Spread Recommendations for Congregate Care Staff:

Staff members have a vital role in caring for loved ones in congregate care and in protecting the health and wellbeing of residents. Staff continue to take preventative measures such as wearing a mask both at work and in the community, social distancing, and practicing proper hand hygiene regardless of whether they have been vaccinated. These measures protect the staff, their families and others in the community as well as residents.

When will my loved one's congregate care setting return to "normal"?

We know that the past year has been extremely difficult for families, their loved ones and the staff that care for them. While we are hopeful that the vaccine will help us return to a "new normal," we must remain vigilant and continue to follow public health recommendations that can reduce the spread and impact of the virus.

In the months ahead, the Commonwealth will consider changes in recommendations for visitation, testing, screening, personal protective equipment use, and isolation/quarantine, for congregate care settings after reviewing any future recommendations from the CDC. Until that time, congregate care sites should continue to follow current state and federal guidance.

Family Resources and Information

Additional information on the COVID-19 vaccine, including vaccine safety, eligibility, and frequently asked questions can be found at <https://www.mass.gov/covid-19-vaccine>.