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Cooper County Public Health Center

17040 Klinton Drive Boonville, MO 65233
Telephone: (660) 882-2626 ~ Fax: (660) 882-2586

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June 15, 2020

Guidance for visitations transitions at Missouri long-term care facilities

Media Contact:

Lisa Cox

Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services

Lisa.Cox@health.mo.gov

Clarification of news release: Guidance for visitations transitions at Missouri long-term care facilities

In conjunction with the State's reopening, DHSS will soon be releasing reopening guidance to long-term care facilities. The long-term care facility guidance will be a phased-in approach that will take into consideration many factors including the current status of COVID-19 in the community and current status of COVID-19 in the facility. In addition, other facility-specific guidance will likely be included in the reopening plan in line with guidance released from CMS.

Long-term care facilities will not be fully reopened today, on June 16. Since the underlying health conditions of residents in these facilities make them more vulnerable to COVID-19, the full reopening of all facilities will occur gradually and in phases. However, in order to allow facility residents a form of in-person visitation with family members and loved ones until a facility can fully reopen, the State will ease restrictions to allow for outside and window visitation at long-term care facilities assuming proper social distancing protocols and other criteria are being met.

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JEFFERSON CITY, MO – As the State of Missouri reopens on June 16, long-term care facilities are an important piece of this process for many Missourians. When COVID-19 first knowingly entered the United States in January, long-term care facilities quickly became one of the more vulnerable environments disease spread. In late March, health officials began seeing Missouri long-term care facilities impacted.

Guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid (CMS), which included visitation restrictions, was adopted and implemented among long-term care facilities throughout Missouri in order to prevent visitors from unknowingly carrying the virus in and infecting a population of individuals at high risk of experiencing severe or even fatal symptoms of COVID-19.

Throughout the duration of the nationwide pandemic, 222 Missouri long-term care facilities have reported at least one case among staff or residents.

Director of the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS) Dr. Randall Williams **issued an Order** on May 18 requiring congregate living facilities, to include long-term care, to report to DHSS within 24 hours when a positive test result is received among staff or residents. In conjunction, increased testing capacity in Missouri allowed the State to execute new strategies for addressing outbreaks early or even before they start and arrange comprehensive testing. The "box in" strategy has been implemented in 107 facilities since May 18, and it helps keep the virus contained to prevent further spreading.

According to CMS data, Missouri ranks well below national averages for cases per 1,000 residents, resident deaths and nursing staff cases per 1,000 residents. This data along with a 43 percent decrease in hospitalizations in Missouri since May 1 and increased testing capabilities have caused the State to change the guidance for long-term care facilities.

Although the State reopens on June 16, local officials will still have the authority to put rules, regulations or ordinances in place. The State's updated guidance impacts facilities wanting to **allow outdoor visits and visits through an open window** for residents who are bedbound or who cannot otherwise leave their room. Additionally, guidance is being provided for facilities wanting to **allow communal dining and group activities**. The State asks that several items be considered when determining reopening plans, but each facility will ultimately decide on their own protocol related to visits. Facilities should be notifying residents' families of their procedures for visitations once they are in place.

"We're incredibly appreciative of all of Missouri's citizens and our providers whose efforts have allowed us to transition to this next phase," said Williams. "We recognize everyone's patience and are thankful to share this welcome news so that loved ones can visit together again while continuing to follow measures intended to protect their health. With our Order in place that requires reporting of a single case by the facility within 24 hours, we will continue to watch our long-term care facilities closely during this transition period."

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