



Guidelines for Outdoor Visitation

These outdoor visitation guidelines apply to nursing homes and community residential care facilities.* DHEC recognizes that isolation can have serious effects on and impact the health and well-being of residents in these facilities and their loved ones. Current data indicate that risk of transmission in outdoor settings is lower compared to indoor settings. To balance the strong desire of residents and their loved ones to communicate in person with the need to protect this vulnerable population from COVID-19, DHEC is providing criteria and guidelines for limited outdoor visitation at these facilities. These criteria and guidelines for visitation incorporate the most recent [CMS guidance for reopening nursing homes](#), [CDC guidance for COVID-19 in nursing homes](#), [CMS long-term care facility testing requirements](#), and other states' plans. It is up to each individual facility to determine whether they will allow outdoor visitation, and if allowed, the outdoor visitation must be implemented in accordance with these guidelines. Each facility should communicate their visitation policy with residents' loved ones and keep them informed of any changes to their visitation policy. **Visitation may commence for the facilities when they have met the criteria below and according to their individual facility plans.**

Criteria for Facility to Offer Limited Outdoor Visitation

The facility must ensure that every item on the checklist is met before it offers visitation.

- Screening of residents for any symptoms consistent with COVID-19 infection with documentation is occurring at least daily and for staff at the start of each shift.
- Facility has adequate staffing and personal protective equipment (PPE).
- Facility must provide their written plan for limited outdoor visitation to DHEC's Healthcare Quality division.
- There have been **no cases** among staff and residents identified in the facility within the last **14 days**.
- For a nursing home, testing must be occurring per [CMS requirements](#) before visitation may begin at the facility. Community residential care facilities (and intermediate care facilities for individuals with intellectual disabilities who are recommended to follow these guidelines) may begin visitations before testing is in place, but testing as described in the [CMS requirements for nursing homes](#) must be occurring within 30 days from when these Guidelines for Outdoor Visitation are issued.

Triggers for Temporarily Suspending Visitations at a Facility

- If **one or more** cases are identified in residents and/or staff members, visitation must be suspended until CMS testing protocols are completed. Visitation may resume if fewer than three total cases have been identified.
- If **three or more cases** are identified in staff members and/or residents within a 14-day period, visitation must be suspended. Visitation may resume 14 days after the identification of the last case.

* DHEC recommends that intermediate care facilities for individuals with intellectual disabilities also follow these guidelines.



- Note: A resident that previously tested positive and now retests positive within three months of original positive test, is not considered a new case. It is unknown at this time whether an individual can be re-infected. This guidance may be updated as more information is learned on viral persistence and risk for reinfection.
- For a nursing home, if testing is not occurring per CMS requirements, visitation must be suspended. For a community residential care facility (or an intermediate care facility for individuals with intellectual disabilities who are recommended to follow these guidelines), testing as described in CMS requirements for nursing homes must be occurring within 30 days from when these “Guidelines for Outdoor Visitation” are issued, or else visitation must be suspended until testing is in place and criteria are met.

Facility Criteria

- The facility must establish a schedule for outdoor visitation hours and should work with prospective visitors individually.
- The facility should communicate their visitation policy with residents’ family members and keep them informed of any changes to their policy, including whether they allow outdoor visitations.
- The facility is permitted to limit the days of the week for visits, the hours of the day for visits, and the number of times per day or week for visits.
- The facility must have time limits for visitations, depending on the visitor having appropriate test results. See “Visitor Criteria” below.
- The facility must establish policies and procedures that address visitation, to include but not limited to, restricting the number of visitors permitted to visit at one time (maximum of two visitors) and per day in order to not overwhelm residents and staff. This written plan must be submitted to DHEC’s Healthcare Quality division at ACC-HealthReg@dhec.sc.gov prior to beginning limited outdoor visitation.
- The facility must ensure the outdoor spaces provide adequate protection from the weather. However, the facility should only permit the visits at times when the weather would not put residents and visitors at risk.
- The facility should consider prioritizing visitation for eligible residents with emotional distress or other conditions that have been exacerbated by continued isolation.
- The facility must have enough staff on duty to help the resident transition outdoors, supervise visits, and wipe down visitation areas before and after each visit.
- The facility must ensure staff sanitize the designated outdoor visitation spaces with EPA-registered disinfectant at least before and after each visit.
- The facility must ensure that staff supervising the residents during visits are trained in patient safety and infection control measures and enforce social distancing and masks requirements for the duration of the visit. The facility must ensure that staff maintain visual observation while also



providing distance necessary for the privacy of the visit and conversation. The facility must ensure the residents remain in their designated outdoor visitation location for the duration of the visit and must not permit residents to approach or enter any vehicles or other modes of transportation.

- The facility must ensure that staff provide appropriate personal care and supervision to residents taking into consideration their individual needs and conditions, including need for sunscreen, hydration, appropriate clothing for the weather, heat sensitivity, and wandering and other behaviors.
- The facility is only permitted to designate outdoor spaces for the visits, and therefore must ensure the outdoor spaces are accessible without visitors entering the facility.
- The facility must ensure the designated outdoor visitation spaces are clearly marked to indicate the positions for the resident and visitor during visit and at least six feet apart.
- The facility must establish policies and procedures for conducting pre-visit orientation to include ensuring visitors properly wear a surgical face mask covering their mouth and nose and understand the strict requirement of six-foot social distancing.
- The facility must establish policies and procedures for screening for COVID-19 signs and symptoms, including checking temperatures to assess for fever (100.4°F or greater), for visitors at a screening location designated outdoors when the visitor checks in for the visit.
- The facility must document each visitor at the designated outdoor location before and after their visit, to include, at a minimum, the date of visit, check-in and check-out times, visitor's signature, visitor contact information (i.e., full name, address, telephone number, and email address), results of their symptom screening, prior COVID-19 test results (if any), relationship to resident they are visiting, and staff that assisted with the visit.
- The facility must provide alcohol-based hand rub to visitors and signage on proper use.
- The facility must establish any additional policies and procedures needed to ensure the safety of the outdoor visits and must consider individual needs to residents.
- The facility that chooses to set up Plexiglas visitation booths must establish policies and procedures to include the use of these three-sided protective and sealed booths and the need to sanitize the booths before and after each visit. The visitation booths must have anti-tipping protections, must have a height that extends at least two feet above all the participants' heads, and must have a width that extends at least two feet beyond the participants on the sides.
- The facility must maintain an adequate supply of personal protective equipment (PPE), including masks, gloves, face shields, and gowns as indicated, for routine facility use and for use in family visits.
- The facility should pay particular attention to the temperature outdoors and advance planning should be done to maximize protection from the sun and heat.
- The facility is not required to allow outdoor visitation. The facility has discretion to determine whether to permit outdoor visitation between residents and visitors and may halt the practice at



any time based on disease transmission in the facility or community, visitor non-compliance, weather or outdoor temperature, or other factors.

- The facility should consider their recent and current number of staff and residents with confirmed cases of COVID-19 in determining whether to permit outdoor visitation.

Resident Criteria

- Residents that are currently in isolation due to recently testing positive for COVID-19, have signs and symptoms of COVID-19, or currently are in a quarantine or observation period are not eligible for outdoor visits.
- Residents that are not currently but have previously tested positive for COVID-19 are permitted only if they no longer require transmission-based precautions in accordance with CDC and DHEC guidelines.
- Residents must have the ability to safely transition, with or without staff assistance, from their room to the outdoor visit location and remain safe in the designated location.
- Residents must not be transported through any space designated as COVID-19 care space or space where residents suspected or confirmed to be infected with COVID-19 or under quarantine are present.
- Residents must wear a surgical face mask, unless a contraindication is present, at all times during the visit, including the transition to and from the outdoor visitation location. Residents must be positioned at least six feet away from visitors at all times, unless in an outdoor visitation location that encloses them in a Plexiglas visitation booth as set forth in “Facility Criteria.”

Visitor Criteria

- A visitor is limited to a maximum visit of **15 minutes** duration unless they provide documentation of either of the following, in which case they may visit for a maximum of **one hour**:
 - A negative result for a COVID-19 **PCR or antigen test** performed within the last **five days**.
 - A positive result for a COVID-19 **antibody (serology) test** performed within the last **30 days**.
- Only **two visitors** are permitted to visit a resident at one time.
- Visitors should be restricted to children **12 years or older**. Special family circumstances warranting children under age 12 to visit can be approved by individual facilities on a case-by-case basis.
- Children must be accompanied by their guardian at all times. The child’s guardian is responsible for ensuring the child follows safety measures, including social distancing and wearing a surgical face mask for the duration of the visit. Face masks should not be used by any children under the age of two that have been approved by the facility to visit under special family circumstances.



- Visitors may bring pets if the facility permits and the visitor maintains control of the pet for the duration of the visit. The pet should remain in a carrier, in the visitor's grasp, or on a leash at all times.
- Visitors must wear a surgical face mask over their mouth and nose for the duration of the visit, including to and from their vehicle or other mode of transportation. Face shields may not be used in lieu of surgical face masks for visitors, though they may be used in addition to the mask or covering if the visitor so chooses.
- Visitors must strictly maintain social distancing for the duration of the visit, including remaining at least six feet away from residents, unless in an outdoor location utilizing a Plexiglas visitation booth as described in "Facility Criteria." Visitors are not permitted to have any physical contact with residents, including hugging, kissing, holding hands, or any other physical contact.
- Upon arrival for a visit, visitors must go to the designated outdoor visitor screening location to sign-in and provide contact information.
- In the facility's designated outdoor visitor screening location, visitors must be screened for signs and symptoms of COVID-19, including checking temperature to assess for fever (100.4°F or greater), provide documentation of their COVID-19 test result (if any), and attest that they have not been instructed to be in quarantine currently.
- Visitors must use alcohol-based hand rub upon entering and exiting the outdoor visitation location.
- Visitors are only permitted in the designated outdoor visitor screening location and the designated outdoor visitation location. Visitors are not permitted to enter the facility's buildings at any time.
- Visitors must only visit the resident they intended to visit at the designated outdoor visitation location.
- Visitors should contact the facility with any questions about whether the facility is allowing outdoor visitation, because facilities are not required to allow outdoor visitation.

If a facility has questions about how these guidelines apply to their facility, DHEC will consult by appointment. These guidelines allowing for outdoor visitation at nursing homes and community residential care facilities (and recommended for visitation at intermediate care facilities for individuals with intellectual disabilities) are subject to modification or revocation at DHEC's discretion. Guidelines and criteria for future limited indoor visitation will be forthcoming.