



Interim Guidance: Prevention and Management of COVID-19 in Long-Term Care Facilities

Last updated February 1, 2024

The following guidance was developed by the San Francisco Department of Public Health (SFPDH) for use by local facilities. It is posted at <https://sf.gov/resource/2022/covid-19-guidance-high-risk-settings>

Summary of Changes since the 12/11/2023 Version

CDPH recently released [updated COVID-19 isolation guidance](#) for the general public. This guidance affects non-healthcare congregate settings (RCFs), but not healthcare facilities (SNFs). At minimum:

- Staff and residents of RCFs who **test positive** for COVID-19 should:
 - Stay home until symptoms are mild and improving, with no fever for 24hrs
 - Wear a well-fitted mask around others for 10 days, regardless of symptoms
- Staff and resident **close contacts** of COVID-19 in RCFs should:
 - Monitor for symptoms, and test if symptoms appear
 - Mask for 10 days while around people who are at high-risk of severe disease
 - Consider testing 5 days after last exposure if asymptomatic if around others at high risk of severe disease

Settings at higher risk for COVID-19 transmission, outbreaks, and/or with residents at increased risk of severe disease may wish to continue to implement additional requirements that are more protective for their residents and staff.

AUDIENCE: Administrators of Long-Term Care Facilities (LTCFs), which encompass the California Department of Social Services/Community Care Licensing Division and Department of Public Health Licensing and Certification Program Facilities in San Francisco. These include Adult Residential Facilities (ARF); Residential Care Facilities for the Elderly (RCFE); Residential Care Facilities – Continuing Care; Residential Care Facilities for the Chronically Ill (RCFCI); and Skilled Nursing Facilities (SNF) that provide 24-hour skilled care on site.

PURPOSE: To help LTCFs understand the health practice and safety requirements at their facility to prevent and manage the spread of COVID-19 among staff and residents. This interim guidance may change as knowledge, community transmission, access to vaccines, community practices, and state guidance change. Facilities are responsible for following generally the strictest among CDPH, CDSS, local, and state health orders in a timely manner and for updating Mitigation Plans required by their licensing bodies.

BACKGROUND: LTCFs provide residential care to people who require varying levels of support. Because of the heterogeneity of residents, facilities, access to and uptake of prevention, treatment, and vaccination strategies, SFPDH is summarizing key components of infection prevention and mitigation of transmission.

This document provides a summary guidance to LTCFs in the City & County of San Francisco on:

| | |
|---|---|
| Positive case: reporting, isolation, and quarantine | 2 |
| Testing guidance | 4 |
| Treatment | 5 |
| Vaccination and other infection prevention and control guidelines | 6 |
| Special considerations for memory care and behavioral units..... | 7 |
| Transfer of patients with COVID-19 to LTCFs | 7 |
| Visitation, communal dining, and activities | 7 |
| Resources | 8 |

Positive case: reporting, isolation, and quarantine

Reporting:

All facilities are required to notify SFDPH promptly when any of the following occur:

| |
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| <p style="text-align: center;">SFDPH Communicable Disease Control Unit – COVID Team Contact: COVID.Outbreak@sfdph.org or (415) 554-2830</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reporting threshold is met: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ SNF: Any case of COVID-19 in a resident or staff member ○ RCF: Three or more linked cases within 7 days • Residents with severe respiratory infection resulting in hospitalization or death. |
|--|

For SNFs, reporting any suspected or confirmed COVID-19 case or outbreak¹ is required ([AFL 23-09](#)). For RCFs, facilities are only required to report once they reach outbreak threshold² ([PIN 23-04](#)).

Please note that these facility types now have different thresholds for “outbreak.”

Initiate the following steps when a resident or staff case is identified:

1. **Isolate positive or symptomatic individual(s).** For SNFs, see [CDC](#); for RCFs, see [PIN 23-07](#)
2. **Identify and test close contacts** when indicated in accordance with [CDC](#) and [PIN 23-07](#)
3. **Notify** SFDPH COVID Disease Response Unit per Reporting section above.
4. **Cohort residents** according to symptoms and testing results, as outlined in [CDC](#) and [PIN 23-02](#)
5. **Outbreak status, admissions** during surges: see [AFL 21-08](#) on crisis and contingency planning for staffing shortages and collaborating with SFDPH to manage admissions during outbreaks.
6. **Communicate** with SFDPH as requested during the outbreak.

¹ An [outbreak](#) in a SNF is one or more facility-acquired COVID-19 cases in a resident OR three or more epidemiologically-linked cases among staff. Thresholds for additional investigation and mandatory reporting to the health department are noted in [AFL 23-09](#).

² RCFs are considered “a non-healthcare, congregate residential setting.” Per [CDPH](#), an outbreak in these settings is three cases within a 7-day period among epidemiologically-linked residents and/ or staff. Facilities unsure about epidemiologic links between cases are invited to reach out to our team for consultation.

7. **Monitor** positive and exposed residents with the frequency described below. Notify their physician as soon as possible.
8. **Start treatment** for eligible residents as soon as possible, with clinical consultation.

Although it is not a State or local mandate for residents to be up-to-date on vaccination³, it is highly encouraged that **everyone be fully vaccinated and complete all recommended boosters**, once eligible, to maintain the strongest health protections for staff and residents in these settings.

Isolation and Quarantine

The table below compiles AFL and PIN recommendations for isolation and post-exposure management of LTCF staff and residents. **Isolation** refers to separation of a positive or suspected case from others. **Quarantine** refers to the observation period for residents upon new admission or return from >24h leave, onset of symptoms, or close contact⁴

Note that all guidance below is regardless of the individual's vaccination status.

| Facility Type | Who | Guidance | Isolation | Quarantine/ Work Restriction ⁵ |
|---------------|----------|--|--|---|
| SNF | Staff | AFL 21-08 CDC | 5 days minimum, with negative test. Continue to wear fitted N95 until day 10. OR 10-day isolation with no test | None. Test no earlier than 24hrs after exposure, and then on days 3 and 5 post-exposure. Mask around others for a total of 10 days. |
| | Resident | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 days since symptom onset (or positive test if asymptomatic) AND • No fever for 24hrs AND • Symptom improvement If immune-compromised, 10-20 days isolation with clinical consultation | None. Test no earlier than 24hrs after exposure, and then on days 3 and 5 post-exposure. Mask around others for a total of 10 days. |

³ Per San Francisco Health Officer Order, a person is "Up-to-Date on Vaccination" when they have both (i) completed an initial vaccination series and (ii) received all recommended boosters, once booster-eligible, immediately upon receipt of the most last recommended booster. Until a person is Booster-Eligible, they are considered Up-to-Date on Vaccination two weeks after completing their full initial series of vaccination.

⁴A close contact is an individual who shared indoor airspace e.g., within the same four walls for a cumulative ≥15min over 24hrs with someone with SARS-CoV2 infection during their infectious period.

⁵ Individuals who have recovered from infection within the last 30 days do not need to response test during outbreaks if asymptomatic.

| Facility Type | Who | Guidance | Isolation | Quarantine/ Work Restriction ⁵ |
|---------------|-------------------|---------------------------|--|--|
| RCF | Staff or Resident | PIN 23-07 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Until symptoms are mild and improved AND • No fever for 24hrs Wear a mask for a total of 10 days, regardless of symptoms. | None. Test within 5 days after last exposure and/or if symptoms develop. Mask around high-risk individuals for a total of 10 days. |

Resident considerations: isolation of residents who test positive

Please see [CDC](#) and [PIN 23-07](#) or SNF and RCF resident guidance, respectively.

- Everyone who tests positive should wear a well-fitted mask for 10 days when around others, regardless of vaccination status or isolation status.
- Treatment for COVID-19, if indicated, should start with clinical consultation as soon as possible to prevent hospitalization and death; see Treatment section and [sf.gov](#).

Resident considerations: observation or quarantine of residents

Per [CDC](#) and [PIN 23-07](#), quarantine is no longer routinely required after close contact or return to the facility. However, in situations of uncontrolled spread where a facility-wide testing approach is used, quarantine may be reinstated to manage exposed individuals.

Guidance on symptomatic residents and removing residents from isolation or quarantine

Additional clinical input is recommended for symptomatic residents who test negative for COVID-19 and other viral infections. Residents should remain in quarantine unless clinical consultation determines another cause for symptoms, with appropriate treatment.

- Symptomatic residents should be in quarantine for symptoms and not be roomed with confirmed positive residents until testing confirms diagnosis.
- For symptomatic individuals with a negative antigen test, see Testing guidance below

Testing guidance

Symptomatic testing

Regardless of vaccination status or prior positive test, **all residents and/or staff** who are **symptomatic need to test immediately** and should isolate in their current room until results are received per [CDC](#) and [PIN 23-07](#).

Test results depend on how much virus is in the sample and other factors. To reduce the risk of a missing an infection in someone who is symptomatic:

- For symptomatic individuals with a negative antigen test and high clinical suspicion for COVID (recent close contact,) SFPD recommends a confirmatory PCR or repeat antigen test 1-2 days later. Confirmatory PCR is not recommended in any other situation
- **When sending a test for symptomatic residents, facilities should also test for other viral infections (e.g. flu when flu circulating, respiratory viral panel with RSV)**

Diagnostic screening testing

Surveillance testing may be indicated for asymptomatic residents and/or staff without close contact or high-risk exposure to a positive case. In most instances, LTCF residents/staff who have **previously tested positive within the last 30 days should not undergo surveillance testing, unless symptomatic.**

Residents

Testing of asymptomatic, newly-admitted residents is at the discretion of the receiving facility ([CDC](#)).

HCPs/Staff

Routine screening testing of asymptomatic staff is no longer required, but facilities may consider for:

- Individuals with underlying immunocompromising conditions (e.g., organ transplantation, cancer treatment), which might impact the level of protection provided by COVID-19 vaccine
- Staff (regardless of vaccination status) who are returning from [vacation, leave, travel, or caring for a positive household member](#)

Response testing

SNFs should refer to [CDC](#) and RCF to [PIN 23-07](#) when applying response testing in their facilities. In general, LTCFs are encouraged to selectively test close contacts as opposed to facility-wide response testing if they can contact trace and are not experiencing uncontrolled transmission. However, facilities should maintain the supplies and ability to ramp up testing if needed or recommended by the public health department.

Individuals who have recovered from COVID-19 in the last 30 days are exempt from response testing if asymptomatic, per [AFL 21-08](#), [PIN 23-07](#), and [CDC](#).

Treatment

Age and co-morbidities are currently the strongest risk factors for progression to severe disease and death, even in individuals who are vaccinated. Facilities should [seek clinical input to start treatment](#) (with lab draws if needed) for residents regardless of vaccination status **as soon as** possible, for individuals with:

- Recently diagnosed with symptomatic COVID-19 AND
- Mild or moderate disease NOT requiring hospitalization AND
- At risk for progression to severe COVID-19, due to any one of the following:
 - Age 50 or older, especially anyone age 65 or older
 - Under age 50 with [risk factors for severe disease](#)
 - [Immunocompromised](#)
 - Unvaccinated or not completely vaccinated
 - Pregnant

For congregate sites (RCFs) that do not have on-site licensed prescribers, contact the resident's primary care clinic or Test-to-Treat locations (see [PIN 22-04](#)) and sf.gov [Outpatient therapeutic information for providers](#). Additional information about treatment resources can be found in [AFL 23-29](#).

Vaccination and other infection prevention and control guidelines

Vaccination

Being up-to-date on vaccination prevents severe illness and death due to COVID-19. In San Francisco, **LTCF workers must complete a primary series and at least one booster, once eligible.** This booster does not need to be an updated formulation (e.g. the bivalent booster released in Sept 2022). **Though not required, being up to date with all recommended boosters is highly encouraged for all workers, residents, and visitors.** Immunization requirements for healthcare workers are outlined in [SF Health Order 2023-02: COVID-19 Vaccination of Healthcare Personnel](#).

Prevent staff from working while ill

COVID-19 infections often start from household or community-acquired illness among staff, who then transmit to others at facilities. **Symptomatic staff, regardless of vaccination status, should notify their supervisor, seek testing, consider treatment if they have at least [one risk factor for severe disease](#), and NOT report to work.**

- Facility HR should be aware of resources for positive or symptomatic staff, e.g., [isolation](#), food, cleaning supplies, and state-mandated COVID-19 sick leave hours.

Screen and monitor everyone for symptoms

All visitors, staff, vendors, residents returning from outings, and other individuals (except for 911 responders) should screen for COVID-19 symptoms upon entry, per [CDC Guidance for Healthcare Personnel](#) (SNFs) and [PIN 23-07](#) (RCFs). Due to increased community transmission of respiratory illnesses, facilities should utilize active symptom screening during “flu season” (November 1 – April 30) ([AFL 23-36](#)). This screening strategy should also be utilized during respiratory illness outbreaks. In all other scenarios, passive screening (self-screening) is acceptable for staff, visitors, and others who visit the facility.

Recognize and respond rapidly to atypical COVID-19 signs and symptoms

Monitor all residents for COVID-19 symptoms. People with COVID-19 can have no symptoms, subtle [symptoms](#), or moderate to severe illness. Recognize **atypical symptoms of COVID-19 seen among older individuals**, because these can often predict worsening and hospitalization: changes mental status (e.g., lethargy, confusion, agitation, behavior change) poor oral intake, falls, weakness.

- SNFs should monitor residents at least daily. SNF residents in quarantine or observation should be monitored twice a day (or once a shift) and residents with confirmed or suspected COVID-19 infection should be monitored every 4 hours (or twice a shift).
- RCFs should observe residents for any changes in condition, but are no longer required to perform daily temperature checks ([PIN 23-07](#)). Ill residents should be checked as often as needed to determine any signs of distress (e.g. trouble breathing, altered mental status, or other serious symptoms).

Personal protective equipment (PPE) and hygiene

Per [SF Health Order 23-01: Masking of Personnel in Healthcare and Jail Settings](#), all healthcare staff are required to wear a well-fitted mask while working in the same space as a patient/resident. Note that this guidance is stricter than CA state guidance.

Provide staff with specific training on transmission-based precautions and [appropriate use of PPE](#).

- Staff should wear appropriate PPE as outlined in [AFL 23-12](#) and [PIN 22-15](#).
- **Ensure that all staff have been fit-tested for N95 respirators.** Fit-testing is valid for one year; skilled nursing facilities should **renew fit-testing annually**.
 - We highly encourage staff to wear N95s and eye protection throughout the facility during substantial and high community transmission.
- **Facilities must continue to adhere to [Cal/OSHA standards](#).** Clean and disinfect surfaces per [CDC guidance](#).
- Hand hygiene: Everyone entering the facility, before and after meals, entering break rooms, after using bathrooms, before indoor communal activities. Maintain warm water, soap, paper towels (avoid dryers that can spread aerosols) when possible.

Physical distancing

In general, maintaining six feet reduces overcrowding. Greater distances may be safer, depending on the aerosol-generating activity, rate of shedding of the individual, source control, ventilation, and susceptibility of others. Follow guidance per [PIN 23-07](#) and [CDC Guidance for Healthcare Personnel](#) on visitation and distancing.

Special considerations for memory care and behavioral units

Prioritize Memory Care units and Behavioral units (locked units) for early, active measures to prevent infection which can lead to rapid transmission.

- To reduce risk of rapid transmission, use creative strategies to keep residents out of isolation areas; games to remember handwashing; and other cues.
- Per [PIN 21-19](#), consider opening windows for ventilation when feasible, safe, and secure or portable air cleaners per CDPH guidance on ventilation.
- For recommendations on managing COVID in Memory Care units, refer to [PIN 21-19](#).

Transfer of patients with COVID-19 to LTCFs

Patients with COVID-19 may be transferred to LTCFs if they are clinically stable, even if they still require isolation/transmission-based precautions, as long as the facility can reasonably accommodate the resident **without putting existing residents at risk**.

Facilities are no longer required to seek SFDPH approval prior to discharging COVID+ patients to a LTCF.

Visitation, communal dining, and activities

Socialization and meaningful connection are critical for maintaining health, especially among LTCF residents. Facilities should continue to offer multiple ways to connect with loved ones including outdoors when safety and security allow, and virtually to maximize visitation options.

Visitation

LTCFs must follow [CDC Guidance for Healthcare Personnel](#) and [PIN 23-07](#).

- Even if visitors have met community level criteria for discontinuing isolation or quarantine, **they should not visit in a healthcare or congregate setting until they have met criteria that would be used to discontinue isolation or quarantine of unvaccinated residents in that setting.**
- Facilities should implement active symptom screening for visitors during flu season (Nov 1 – April 30) and during respiratory disease outbreaks ([AFL 23-36](#)). Signage at with information about how to screen for COVID symptoms is encouraged at all points of entry.
- Visitors are strongly encouraged to wear a well-fitting [face mask](#) (N95, KF94, KN95 or surgical masks are preferred over cloth face coverings) and perform hand hygiene upon entry and in all common areas in the facility.

Exceptions:

- **Visitors who are visiting for essential visitation needs, including visiting a resident in critical condition** when death may be imminent, are exempt from the vaccination and testing requirements, however, must comply with all infection control and prevention requirements applicable for indoor visits.
- If the resident is unable to leave their room to visit outdoors, visitation may take place indoors, even for visitors who cannot provide proof of vaccination or a negative test. Facilities should prioritize indoor visits in private areas as much as possible.

Communal dining & activities

Facilities should refer to [CDC Guidance for Healthcare Personnel](#) and [PIN 22-28](#) or any versions that supersede them. If there are differing requirements among the CDC, CDPH, CDSS, CDDS, and local public health department guidance or health orders, licensees should follow the strictest requirements.

Residents who are not in isolation may eat in the same room and participate in communal activities without distancing, regardless of vaccination status. Consider outdoor options whenever safety and security allow.

SFDPH may recommend temporarily limitations and/or pausing of communal activities and/or dining if ongoing facility transmission is identified. General visitation guidance may change depending on case rates, variants, and staffing; it is key to communicate with families about visitation updates.

Resources

San Francisco Department of Public Health (SFDPH)

- Health Orders & Directives: <https://sf.gov/healthrules>
 - Facility & care worker requirements: <https://sf.gov/file/facility-and-healthcare-worker-vaccination-requirements-chart>
- Resources for providers: <https://sf.gov/topics/healthcare-providers-and-covid-19>
 - High risk settings: <https://sf.gov/resource/2022/covid-19-guidance-high-risk-settings>
 - Provider guidance on therapeutics: <https://sf.gov/information/covid-19-outpatient-therapeutic-information-providers>

California Department of Public Health (CDPH)

- All Facilities Letters (AFLs): <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CHCQ/LCP/Pages/LNCAFL.aspx>
- Interim guidance for ventilation, filtration, and air quality in indoor environments: <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/COVID-19/Interim-Guidance-for-Ventilation-Filtration-and-Air-Quality-in-Indoor-Environments.aspx>

California Department of Social Services (CDSS)

- Provider Information Notices (PINs) for Adult and Senior Care (ASC) Program: <https://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/community-care-licensing/policy/provider-information-notice/adult-senior-care>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

- Interim Infection Prevention and Control Recommendations to Prevent SARS-CoV-2 Spread in Nursing Homes <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/long-term-care.html>
- Updated Healthcare Infection Prevention and Control Recommendations in Response to COVID-19 Vaccination <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/infection-control-after-vaccination.html#WorkRestriction>
- Return to work criteria for healthcare personnel (updated guidance) <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/return-to-work.html>

Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS)

- COVID-19 LTCF guidance revised: <https://www.cms.gov/files/document/gso-20-39-nh-revised.pdf>