

# Re-opening nursing facilities to visitors during a pandemic: An early look at experiences

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## BACKGROUND

- Over 1.25 million people reside in nursing facilities in the United States<sup>1</sup>
- Nursing facilities have reported **268,707 confirmed cases** of COVID-19 and **61,765 COVID-19 deaths** as of the week of November 2, 2020<sup>2</sup>
- Indiana was one of the first states to implement guidance to re-open nursing facility visitation, starting with outdoor visits in March of 2020
- Without family visits or other outside social contacts, residents may become lonely, despondent, and have feelings of abandonment which may lead to depression, weight loss, and worsened behavioral symptoms of dementia<sup>3</sup>



Table 1. Indiana State Department of Health Visitation Guidelines<sup>2,4</sup>

### Visitor Criteria:

- Must appropriately follow appropriate social distancing and hand hygiene
- Must stay in designated facility locations
- Visitation should be restricted to children 12 years of age or older, some exceptions.
- Children of any age are permitted to visit<sup>1</sup>
- Children under the age of 2 are not required to wear a mask<sup>1</sup>
- Must sign in and provide contact information
- Must be screened for signs and symptoms of COVID-19
- May provide food and beverage to the resident, but it cannot be shared

### Facility Criteria:

- No new COVID-19 cases originating in the facility in the last 14 days
- Scheduling of visitation hours must be established
- Adequate staff must be present for visits
- An approved disinfectant must be used to clean visitation area
- Adequate PPE and alcohol based hand rub must be supplied to residents
- Outdoor visitation space should allow for proper social distancing of 6 ft
- Beautician and barber services are permitted in facilities
- Facilities that are not under restriction due to new facility cases of COVID-19 must allow outdoor visitation and may start offering indoor visitation
- Facilities must offer at least four hours of visitation daily including evening and weekend hours, this can be a mixture of outdoor and indoor visitation<sup>1</sup>

### Resident Criteria:

- Must have the ability to transitions safely from their room to an outdoor visitation location
- Must be screened for signs and symptoms of COVID-19 prior to visit
- Prioritization for visitation should be for residents with diseases that cause progressive cognitive decline and residents expressing feelings of loneliness
- For those who are able should wear a face mask during visitation
- May leave facilities for routine and preventative healthcare visits.

<sup>1</sup>These are additions to the ISDH guidelines added July 17th, 2020, which was after the survey was closed

## METHODS

A survey created using REDCap was sent out electronically to a convenient sample of 39 Indiana nursing facilities on July 7th, 2020 and was closed on July 17th, 2020



Questions included start of visitation date, issues encountered with outdoor visitation, concerns about visitation, and implementation of written visitation policies were obtained via check boxed options



Concerns about indoor visitation were obtained through an open ended question

## SURVEY RESULTS

- 15/39 of facilities responded
- 5 facilities provided written visitation policies
- 4 facilities provided photos of visitation
- 14/15 reported start dates ranging from June 3- June 26
- The most frequently reported issues were:
  - Ensuring adequate staffing during visitation
  - Scheduling
  - Visitors violating mask requirements and social distancing policies



Figure 1. Photos of Family Visitation Set-ups in Indiana Facilities

## WRITTEN VISITATION POLICIES

- All policies included:**
  - 4-5 hours blocks of visitation time
  - Visit duration varying 15-25 minutes
  - Required family members to register for a visitation spot by calling the facility and one provided an online registration option
  - Mostly heterogeneity in policies related to minor visitors
- 2/5 policies** requested that visitors stay in cars while being screened for symptoms and signing in
- 2/5 policies** made mention of prioritizing residents for visits, specifically those experiencing loneliness or psychosocial distress
- 1/5 policies** requested visitors bring their own lawn chairs for visitation

## CONCERNS ABOUT INDOOR VISITATION

- Visitors or residents not following masking or social distancing policy
- Decreased ability to social distance in smaller spaces
- Potential to run out of needed supplies
- Need for additional staff particularly for weekend/evening hours

## DISCUSSION

- Early experiences and facility-level policies provide insight into some variation in operational practices regarding outdoor visitation
- We highlight some ongoing concerns of facility administrative and clinical leaders seeking to implement these new policies



Despite logistical challenges and concerns about increased exposure to the virus, strategies to promote visitation for residents in long term care facilities must remain an urgent priority.

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