STATE OF WASHINGTON
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL AND HEALTH SERVICES
Home and Community Living Administration
Residential Care Services • P.O. Box 45600 • Olympia, Washington 98504

September 15, 2026

This letter supersedes HCLA Letters: AFH #2026-011, ALF #2026-012, CCRSS #2026-007, ESF #2026-010, ICF/IID #2026-003, NH #2026-013

AFH #2026-040
ALF #2026-039
CCRSS #2026-021
ESF #2026-0029
ICF/IID #2026-012
ALTSA: NH #2026-040
RCS Staff Mask Wearing During the 2026-2027 Respiratory Illness Season

Dear Provider, Administrator, or Superintendent,

Beginning October 1, 2026, Residential Care Services (RCS) staff will wear masks when conducting onsite visits in long-term care (LTC) settings.

RCS considered several factors when making this decision, including:

- The increased risk of serious illness among many residents and clients served in LTC settings.
- The potential for respiratory viruses to spread within congregate living and healthcare settings.
- The nature of RCS work, which may require staff to visit multiple settings and interact with different populations in the same day.
- Seasonal respiratory illness activity and current public health guidance.

RCS mask-wearing procedures

During onsite visits, RCS staff will:

- Put on a mask before entering the setting and wear it throughout the visit.
- Replace the mask if it becomes wet, soiled, damaged, or removed.
- Follow any additional infection prevention and control precautions required by the setting.
- Use appropriate personal protective equipment when indicated by Standard or Transmission-Based Precautions.

RCS staff may remove their masks in a well-defined area that is restricted from residents or client access, such as a private meeting room. If a mask is removed, the door will remain closed, and staff will remask before another person enters or an interview is conducted.

Illness and return to work

RCS staff are expected to monitor themselves for symptoms of respiratory illness and remain away from work when they have a suspected or confirmed viral respiratory infection.

RCS follows current Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendations for healthcare personnel. Under the CDC guidance updated September 11, 2026, healthcare personnel with a suspected or confirmed viral respiratory infection should remain away from work until:

- At least three days have passed since symptoms began, or since the first positive test if the person remains asymptomatic;
- They have been fever-free for at least 24 hours without fever-reducing medication;
- Their symptoms are improving; and
- They feel well enough to return to work.

Upon returning, staff should wear source control through at least the end of day seven. The day symptoms began, or the date of the first positive test for a person who remains asymptomatic, is considered day zero.

RCS will continue to monitor respiratory illness activity and public health guidance and will reevaluate this masking requirement in March 2027.

Thank you for your continued commitment to resident and client health and safety. If you have any questions please contact Jamie Ford, RCS Infection Prevention and Control Specialist: jamie.ford1@dshs.wa.gov

Sincerely,

Amy Abbott, Director
Residential Care Services

DSHS: *"Partnering with People"*