

Essential Support Persons

Under the **Safe Start for Long-Term Care** plan, a designated essential support person may visit a resident of long-term care indoors during LTC Phases 1 and 2. These visits are subject to strict safety rules and facility policies.

What is an essential support person (ESP)?

An essential support person (ESP) is a loved one, caretaker, or advocate for a resident of long-term care. In LTC Phases 1 and 2 of the Safe Start for Long-Term Care plan, essential support persons may visit a resident of long-term care indoors.

How may I become an ESP?

An ESP must be aged 18 or older and must have some history of providing companionship or support to the resident. The resident must be consulted before an ESP is appointed. Prospective ESPs should contact their facility of interest and ask about ESP policies.

What if more than one person wants to be the ESP?

Only one person at a time may be the designated essential support person for a resident of long-term care. That title may be transferred to someone else, but the resident must be consulted and the facility must officially approve the transfer.

Where should indoor visits take place?

In LTC Phase 1, indoor visits may only occur in a designated visit area. If no dedicated visit area is possible, only then may a visit occur in a resident's room. In LTC Phase 2, in-room visits are allowed if any roommates agree and social distancing and masking are enforced.

What rules must I follow when visiting?

All visitors to long-term care facilities must be screened and wash their hands prior to entry. Visitors must be masked at all times and wear other PPE as directed. Visitors must strictly observe social distancing, maintaining at least six feet of distance from others.

May I touch or hug the resident that I am visiting?

In general, visitors may not initiate physical contact. Some ESPs may need to provide care to a resident (assistance with eating, bathing, or medication) that involve physical contact. Consult the facility before performing any such task during a visit.

If I am vaccinated, do these rules still apply to me?

Yes. Individuals that have been vaccinated against COVID-19 must abide by all of the same rules and infection control procedures. Masking, social distancing, hand hygiene, and other precautions are still important, and you still must adhere to the facility's visitation policies.

How are ESP and compassionate care visits different?

Essential support persons are more free to visit a resident, once appointed. Compassionate care situations are very specific, and involve end-of-life or psychosocial need situations. The rules for ESP and compassionate care visits are different.

May I visit a resident in quarantine?

Essential support persons may not visit a resident in quarantine, or a resident that is suspected or known to have COVID-19. This means that new admissions subject to a quarantine period are not eligible for visits by an ESP until the quarantine period has expired.

Other Notes

Every long-term care facility must establish a policy for essential support persons.

Visitation to long-term care facilities has been restricted for a year now, and access to loved ones is important for resident wellbeing.

All visitors to long-term care facilities must be screened and wash their hands prior to entry. Within the facility, visitors must wear PPE and maintain a six-foot distance from others at all times.

Facilities should restrict the number of visitors per resident and the number of visitors allowed into the building at a time. Facilities may consider scheduling visits for a fixed length of time.

Residents in quarantine or otherwise suspected of COVID-19 infection may not receive indoor visitors except in compassionate care circumstances. Accommodations should be made to allow these residents access to visitation outdoors, through technology, or through a closed window.