

NH+C reviews visitor options for Long Term Care Center

AUGUST 24, 2020 - Northfield Hospital + Clinics is working on plans to allow some visitors to the Long Term Care Center. The LTCC has been closed to visitors since March 13, 2020 to protect residents from COVID-19, in accordance with guidelines from the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH).

New guidelines from MDH will allow skilled nursing facilities in Minnesota to begin loosening visitor restrictions, starting Aug. 29. Visitor policies are at the discretion of each facility, based on their own conditions.

NH+C is crafting procedures that would allow visits while keeping residents and staff safe. "We're using MDH guidance as a starting point as we set processes and policy. We will be in touch with residents' families when we are ready to accept visitors in a safe way," said Tammy Hayes, RN, MS, CENP, LNHA. Hayes is VP-Chief Nurse Executive and Hospital/LTCC Administrator at NH+C.

Any change in LTCC's visitor policy would take place sometime after Aug 29.

Strict requirements govern visitor policies for skilled nursing facilities to prevent the spread of COVID. Several criteria must be met, including:

- * NO cases of COVID among residents, staff or providers for 28 days
- * Fewer than 10 COVID cases in the county for 14 days (Dakota and Rice county, for NH+C)
- * COVID testing for all residents and staff, based on MDH guidelines
- * Facility size
- * Extent to which staff also works at other long term care facilities

Visitor restrictions may be dialed up or down as the COVID situation changes in the facility, local community, or county.

Minnesota Commissioner of Health Jan Malcolm, MDH and partners developed MDH's guidance for long term care facilities with the recognition that COVID-19 will remain a challenge for many more months.

"We will be dealing with COVID-19 for a long time, and it is important to find a way to allow residents to interact with their loved ones safely," Commissioner Malcolm said in an MDH news release<<https://www.health.state.mn.us/news/pressrel/2020/covidltc081020.html>>. "Residents have been isolated for months, and that presents significant risks for their emotional and social well-being. This guidance [from MDH] helps facilities keep their COVID-19 guard up while taking cautious steps toward ensuring residents have more social connections and interaction."

NH+C's top priority is the safety and health of its LTCC residents and staff.

"We encourage families to stay connected to their loved one via phone, video chat, window visits, and patio visits when possible," Hayes said.

Separately, the Long Term Care Center begins an Essential Caregiver program for residents who have had a family member or support person caring for them in the past.

The program begins the week of August 24, and follows MDH guidance for specific care. An Essential Caregiver is one family member or support person who was engaged in the care of the resident before the COVID-19 pandemic, and has agreed to assist with specific, identified care needs during the pandemic.

This is not a visitor program. Strict requirements must be in place for the Essential Caregiver program to ensure the safety of all the residents and staff, per MDH direction. For LTCC

residents who are eligible for an Essential Caregiver, their designated Essential Caregiver has been contacted directly. The program may need to be paused at any point if conditions change.

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