

## Hospice and Palliative Care Resources for the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19)



### **NHPCO COVID-19 Update – 03/14/20**

*NHPCO has created this update for hospice and palliative care providers to share the most recent news and helpful links regarding this ongoing public health crisis.*

#### **Policy Updates**

On March 13, 2020, after President Trump declared a National Emergency granting Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar authority to temporarily waive certain requirements under the Medicare, Medicaid and CHIP programs, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) released the COVID-19 Emergency Declaration Health Care Providers Fact Sheet and Revised CMS Nursing Home Visitor Guidance. [NHPCO has revised the Nursing Home/Hospice Guidance](#) that applies during COVID-19 that providers can use to inform nursing homes about access for hospice workers. Worksheet linked in resources section below.

#### **COVID-19 Emergency Declaration Health Care Providers Fact Sheet**

The COVID-19 Emergency Declaration Health Care Providers Fact Sheet lists blanket waivers that are currently available. Of particular interest to hospice providers are the following waivers:

##### **Provider Locations**

- Temporarily waive requirements that out-of-state providers be licensed in the state where they are providing services when they are licensed in another state. This applies to Medicare and Medicaid

##### **Provider Enrollment**

- Postpone all revalidation actions
- Allow licensed providers to render services outside of their state of enrollment
- Expedite any pending or new applications from providers

##### **Skilled Nursing Facilities**

- CMS is waiving the requirement at Section 1812(f) of the Social Security Act for a 3-day prior hospitalization for coverage of a skilled nursing facility (SNF) stay provides temporary emergency

coverage of (SNF services without a qualifying hospital stay, for those people who need to be transferred as a result of the effect of a disaster or emergency.

- For certain beneficiaries who recently exhausted their SNF benefits, it authorizes renewed SNF coverage without first having to start a new benefit period.

NHPCO provided [recommendations](#) from the hospice and palliative care provider community including needed flexibility for face to face requirements and telehealth to CMS Administrator Seema Verma. These will help inform the Secretary as he continues to exercise his waiver authority to help all healthcare providers including community-based providers who care for patients in their private homes to combat and contain the novel coronavirus.

### **Revised CMS Nursing Home Visitor Guidance**

CMS Administrator Seema Verma announced that there would be an exception to the visitation restriction for end-of-life situations. This revised guidance also provides details for this exception.

The CMS guidance also details the status of “hospice workers” as health care workers, rather **than visitors and strengthens the language for entry in the facility. Note the language in the guidance: “They should be permitted to come into the facility as long as the meet the CDC guidelines for health care workers.”**

### **The critical sections of the guidance follows:**

[From CMS Guidance to Nursing Facilities \(Revised for Visitation 3/13/2020\)](#)

**For ALL facilities nationwide:** Facilities should restrict visitation of all visitors and non-essential health care personnel, except for certain compassionate care situations, such as an end-of-life situation. In those cases, visitors will be limited to a specific room only.

**Compassionate Situations** (e.g. end-of-life care): For individuals that enter in compassionate situations (e.g., end-of-life care), facilities should require visitors to perform hand hygiene and use Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), such as facemasks. Decisions about visitation during an end of life situation should be made on a case by case basis, which should include careful screening of the visitor (including clergy, bereavement counselors, etc.) for fever or respiratory symptoms. Those with symptoms of a respiratory infection (fever, cough, shortness of breath, or sore throat) should not be permitted to enter the facility at any time (even in end-of-life situations). Those visitors that are permitted, must wear a facemask while in the building and restrict their visit to the resident’s room or other location designated by the facility. They should also be reminded to frequently perform hand hygiene.

### **Exceptions to restrictions:**

- Health care workers: Facilities should follow CDC guidelines for restricting access to health care workers found at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/guidance-risk-assessment-hcp.html>
- This also applies to other health care workers, such as hospice workers, EMS personnel, or dialysis technicians, that provide care to residents. **They should be permitted to come into the facility as long as they meet the CDC guidelines for health care workers.**
- Facilities should contact their local health department for questions, and frequently review the CDC website dedicated to COVID-19 for health care professionals (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/hcp/index.html>).

**Additional guidance for hospice staff:**

Advise visitors, and any individuals who entered the facility (e.g., hospice staff), to monitor for signs and symptoms of respiratory infection for at least 14 days after exiting the facility. If symptoms occur, advise them to self-isolate at home, contact their healthcare provider, and immediately notify the facility of the date they were in the facility, the individuals they were in contact with, and the locations within the facility they visited. Facilities should immediately screen the individuals of reported contact, and take all necessary actions based on findings.

**House Passes 2nd COVID-19 Response Package**

On Saturday March 14, 2020 the House passed H.R. 6201, the Families First Coronavirus Response Act, sending it to the Senate for passage which is expected on Monday. President Trump is expected to sign this legislation. The legislation includes emergency aid provisions (guarantees free coronavirus testing, enhances unemployment insurance, expands food security initiatives, and increases federal Medicaid funding) as well as 14 paid sick days for employees, and three months of paid emergency leave throughout the coronavirus crisis. Employers will be reimbursed for some of these costs through tax credits. The emergency leave provision in the legislation will expire in a year. Additional House action is expected next week during the House recess on a new bill to address the economic damage by the coronavirus. Summary in resources section below.

**Resources**

[Guidance for Infection and Prevention in Nursing Home and Hospice \(3/14/2020\)](#)

[Families First Coronavirus Response Act](#) (information about Bill is under "Updates About Coronavirus")

*For the latest news and links, visit the NHPCO website at [nhpco.org/coronavirus](http://nhpco.org/coronavirus).*