

Eli's Hospice Insider

Access: Will New Nursing Home Visitation Guidance Affect Access?

Modifications discussed in newest policy updates.

In the wake of the Omicron surge's peak, worries about access are resurfacing.

Background: When COVID-19 began, hospices reported difficulties - sometimes extreme - gaining access to their patients in skilled nursing and other facilities. As the pandemic wore on, Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services guidance and other factors broke down most of those barriers.

Now with COVID-19 cases soaring in some facilities, agencies may be worried all over again.

CMS has returned to the issue of nursing home visitors in guidance newly updated for Omicron. "States may instruct nursing homes to take additional measures to make visitation safer, while ensuring visitation can still occur," CMS says in its Nursing Home Visitation Frequently Asked Questions updated Jan. 6.



The FAQs address social visits, but the fact that CMS strongly champions visitation is a good signal for visiting staff, too.

"Access issues were a problem at the beginning, but [I] have not seen that lately," reports **J'non Griffin** with SimiTree Healthcare Consulting. "The SNFs I have seen have measures in place, including testing requirements from outside vendors," Griffin tells AAPC.

"I am not hearing of any new issues from the providers" about nursing home access, agrees **Katie Wehri** with the National Association for Home Care & Hospice.

Keep an eye out: CMS does offer some guidance that could lead to access restrictions in certain situations, however. "Nursing facilities should continue to consult with state and local health departments when outbreaks occur to determine when modifications to visitation policy would be appropriate," CMS says in the updated FAQs. "Facilities should document their discussions with the health department, and the actions they took to attempt to control the transmission of COVID-19."

Note: The five-page updated FAQs are at <https://www.cms.gov/files/document/nursing-home-visitation-faq-1223.pdf>.