



Good Morning,

The holiday season is upon us and DHEC's Healthcare Quality would like to provide reminders and suggestions to Long Term Care Facilities (LTCFs) on how to keep residents and staff safe while celebrating this year.

We understand that year's festivities won't quite be the same as previous years. However, we hope that we can still make these last weeks of the year memorable by following the issued guidance for safely implementing activities.

Fire and Life Safety

It is important to pay close attention to fire and life safety during the upcoming weeks, as well as safety precautions for COVID-19. The National Fire Protection Association's theme this year is "[Serve Up Fire Safety in the Kitchen](#)" which focuses on fire prevention while cooking. We encourage you to practice safe cooking and fire prevention now in preparations for the holidays. A few safe cooking tips: stay in the kitchen while cooking on the stove, frequently check on items that are cooking, and keep loose clothing away from heat sources.

In addition to cooking safety, **we encourage facilities to review the [attached guidance](#) from DHEC on how to protect your facility from fire risks, such as flammable holiday decorations and internal heat sources.** For more information on how to prevent cooking fires and general fire safety information please visit nfpa.org.

Resident Leave of Absence

One of the traditions that we may see a change in this year is residents going home for the holidays. In order to lower the risk of transmission, DHEC strongly recommends against taking residents home for the holidays and encourages alternatives, such as virtual visitation. **Please see the [attached guidance](#) from DHEC on leave of absence policies and proper procedures for residents leaving and re-entering long term care facilities during the holidays.**

Below are alternatives for maintaining a safe environment this holiday season during COVID-19. Healthcare Quality encourages LTCFs to rededicate themselves to the necessary precautions that keep employees and residents safe.

Staying Safe While Celebrating

Please remember to:

- Socially distance all activities, communal dining, and gathering spaces
- Provide hand sanitizer in easily accessible locations
- Wear a mask and safely store the mask while eating or drinking
- Limit contact with commonly touched surfaces or shared items
- Move indoor social events outdoors, if possible
- Do not share food or beverages with each other
- Do not allow buffet style dining. Food should be served by only one person
- Do not permit close contact activities, such as dancing, even with PPE

Safe Alternatives:

- Cards - have family members, friends, and even employees send holiday cards to the resident
- Communal meals can be holiday themed. Remember to socially distance chairs and tables
- If possible, move indoor social events outdoors
- Have a socially distanced Thanksgiving Day Parade viewing on a large screen
- Create a walk-through holiday trail with outdoor lights and decorations
- Bake and take a residents favorite recipe. Deliver in a way that minimizes close contact. Remember to check with the facility to ensure the recipe is within dietary restrictions. Currently, the CDC says there is no evidence to suggest that handling or consuming food is associated with COVID-19.

The CDC offers more low-risk alternatives and guidance [here](#) and [here](#).

CMS and CDC Holiday Recommendations

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) has collaborated with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on new holiday recommendations for long-term care facilities as our country continues fighting the latest wave of the pandemic. DHEC strongly encourages you to review [CMS' COVID Facility Holiday Recommendations guidance](#) along with [the CDC's webpage on holiday celebrations](#), which has more suggestions for preventing the spread of COVID-19.

Please contact acc-healthreg@dhec.sc.gov with any questions or concerns. For fire and life safety specific questions or concerns, contact mcalhadt@dhec.sc.gov.

Thank you and Happy Holidays!
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