

## **COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions: Residents and Families**

**Updated: July 14, 2020**

**New questions are in blue text.**

### **Testing**

- **Are you still testing associates and residents regularly? Once tested, how soon is testing repeated?**

We continue to conduct tests on our associates and residents when necessary, based on their initial test results and state guidelines. Residents will be tested as required by federal and state public health guidelines or as needed based on new signs or symptoms.

- **If an associate tests positive for COVID-19 and is in contact with a resident, will that resident and family member be contacted? What process is in place for contact tracing?**

We notify residents and their respective health care power of attorney if a resident is positive. With each positive result there is an interdisciplinary review to identify potential exposure and point of contacts. The results of the review determine intervention or actions needed to prevent additional exposure. We do not conduct contact tracing. We follow infection-prevention guidance that provides low-exposure risk as our communities adhere to universal masking.

- **Why are you conducting antibody testing?**

IgG or Immunoglobulin G antibodies can be found in all bodily fluids and protect against bacterial and viral infections. The IgG test may help determine whether our residents have these antibodies against the virus and identify previous exposure. As we continue to learn about COVID-19 and the presence of antibodies, the goal is to find out if previous exposure will identify a decreased risk for reinfection or in symptoms with repeat infection. We are hopeful that residents who test positive for antibodies do not need to have the required nasal swab testing as often.

- **Do Ascension Living communities have enough COVID-19 test kits to screen residents and associates?**

Yes, we have a sufficient amount of test kits for periodically screening residents and staff in the months ahead.

- **How often will you be conducting mandatory testing of residents and associates?**

Safety is our top priority. Through proactive testing, we are able to identify asymptomatic individuals who could test positive for the virus, which will help us in our ongoing efforts to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Going forward, we will be conducting tests on our associates when necessary based on their initial test results and state guidelines. Residents will be tested as required by federal and state public health guidelines or as needed based on new signs or symptoms.

- **How are associates screened?**

We will continue screening associates and essential healthcare partners with a series of questions and temperature checks at the start of, and halfway through, every shift.

- **How soon do residents and family members learn the results of COVID-19 testing?**

About two to three days. Residents and family members will receive a call from a community leader with the results.

- **What happens if an associate tests positive for COVID-19?**

Associates who test positive adhere to established infection control protocols with guidance from the Centers Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), and local health departments. They remain off work (furloughed) until cleared by the associate's provider and Associate Health. Ascension is committed to protecting the pay of associates during this time of disruption from COVID-19. Also, if an associate has a fever due to something non-COVID-19 or non-respiratory related, the associate must be free of fever-reducing medications for 24 hours before returning to work.

- **Are you short-staffed when associates are furloughed?**

No. Ascension Living participates in the Ascension Critical Staffing Travel Program, in which associates from other Ascension Living communities or Ascension can sign up to provide interim support at communities where there have been surges or associates have tested positive and are furloughed. These "Ascension travelers" temporarily relocate to our communities for weeks at a time so we can provide uninterrupted quality care to our residents. Ascension travelers may include registered nurses, patient care technicians, licensed practical nurses and housekeeping staff.

- **What happens when a resident tests positive?**

Any resident with a positive test or who is symptomatic is isolated in accordance with guidance from the CDC. If a skilled nursing facility resident tests positive, he or she is cared for by designated, specially trained healthcare personnel who do not interact with other residents or units within the community. Residents who do not have symptoms related to COVID-19 are treated in a separate part of the building and are cared for by a different designated care team to mitigate any possible exposure to COVID-19.

- **Are you conducting antibody testing for residents and staff?**

A couple of our communities have participated in IgG testing of all our residents and associates. IgG or Immunoglobulin G antibodies can be found in all bodily fluids and protect against bacterial and viral infections. The IgG test may help determine whether our residents and associates have these antibodies against the virus. Proactively testing will help us determine if COVID-19 is silently affecting our community. It is a simple blood test – results are confidential and shared with residents about three days after testing. Our medical leaders are encouraging every resident and associate to participate in the IgG testing program as part of our overall infection-control strategy, when a community is selected for testing. A positive igG test does not indicate whether an individual has had an active case or is contagious.

## **Safety**

- **Do state health departments inspect Ascension Living communities?**

Yes. Regulatory services by state health departments in collaboration with the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) have conducted 55 infection prevention surveys with 47 receiving no citations. Those who received minor corrections are reviewing current policy, providing additional education and implementing best practices identified by surveyors who visited communities with perfect surveys.

- **Do you have adequate protective personal equipment (PPE)?**

Yes. We are equipped with proper PPE, including face masks, gloves, gowns and face shields as needed by associates and face masks for residents. In addition, we are taking proactive steps with our distributors and suppliers to help with continued access to supplies to keep our residents and associates safe. We are arranging expedited shipments directly from manufacturers, assessing alternative products and taking advantage of our abilities as a national system to make inventory transfers when appropriate.

- **What precautionary actions do you take to keep residents and associates safe?**

We have:

- Put in place visitation restrictions designed to help protect our residents, associates and families
- Conducted proactive tests in our skilled nursing and assisted living communities to identify asymptomatic residents and prevent negative outcomes
- Implemented comprehensive screening of all who enter our community
- Applied social-distancing measures
- Required all associates and clinical partners to wear a face mask when working within our communities
- Regularly conducted stringent deep cleaning that follows our updated processes

- Obtained resident and associate baseline data to monitor for signs or symptoms of infection

- **What guidance do you follow for communicable-disease protocols?**

Our team has been following the directions of the CDC and CMS. In partnership with the state health departments, and our operational and clinical teams, we are monitoring the care for all of our residents. Based on their guidance, we are proactively implementing precautions that reduce the risk of exposure and possible spread to others. This includes advanced efforts to monitor residents' health and identify symptoms – and detect regional trends in the growth of COVID-19 cases.

## Reopening

- **With certain cities seeing a resurgence in cases, will Ascension Living need to revert to Phase 1 (Red Phase -- very high risk)?**

No, not at this time. We are monitoring closely the situation in cities throughout the United States. Factors that would make a community revert include: sustained rise in the region's positivity rate, an increase in hospital admissions, hospital capacity not able to handle the surge and an outbreak threatens the health of the region. For more information about reopening, please review the Yellow and Orange phased-opening flyers at <https://ascensionliving.org/Resources>.

- **Is outdoor visitation safe?**

Limited outdoor visitation is now available at select communities per state and Centers for Disease Control and Prevent (CDC) guidelines. As communities are ready, we are scheduling 20-minute outdoor visits (limited to two visitors per resident) that will promote a safe environment for residents, visitors and associates. Visitors and residents will be required to wear face coverings and use good hand hygiene. Areas will be thoroughly disinfected between visits and associates will be readily available to ensure that it is a safe and welcoming experience for everyone. We know you want to see your loved ones and are doing all that we can to open visitation that complies with guidelines. We have sent information to residents and families in those communities that now have outdoor visitation.

- **What is the next phase of reopening our communities?**

We will be making additional modifications to protect the most vulnerable -- our residents. Our website features a detailed description of what will be allowed in our Yellow -- moderate-risk phase, starting June 15. This is a fluid document that will be adjusted as needed based on guidelines released by the CDC, CMS and state and local health departments. We may need to revert to precautions of an earlier phase based on



possible resurgence of infections. We will continue to rely on experts for guidance on the most effective measures to help keep our residents and associates safe, healthy and connected during this historic time.

- **Are visitors allowed in the Yellow – moderate-risk phase?**

Within our retirement communities, we will be relaxing some of these restrictions to continue to maximize the safety of residents, and at the same time, provide our residents with the social and spiritual support they need to thrive. Limited visitors will be allowed according to guidelines established by the CDC and CMS for individuals age 65 and older and for congregate living spaces. And, we will be opening additional designated entrances and exits.

Our assisted living communities, memory care communities and skilled nursing facilities will continue to adhere to visitation restrictions outlined by the CDC, CMS and state health departments. Per the CMS, given the critical importance in limiting COVID-19 exposure in nursing homes, our decisions on relaxing restrictions will be made based on careful review of a number of facility-level, community, state factors/orders, and in collaboration with state and/or local health officials. The reopening of our communities is dependent on federal/state/local government guidance.

## Medical Care

- **What if a resident needs medical care, but can't get in for an in-person doctor visit?**

You and your family can access Ascension Online Care ([ascension.org/onlinecare](https://ascension.org/onlinecare)) around the clock. Doctors can treat colds/flu, eye infections, sinus or respiratory infections, seasonal allergies and more. Video chat with a doctor using your smartphone, tablet or laptop. Please don't put off emergency care for signs of a heart attack or stroke, COVID-19 symptoms or other life-threatening conditions. Hospitals are safe places to receive care from trained healthcare professionals. Visit [ascension.org](https://ascension.org) or [amitahealth.org](https://amitahealth.org), our Illinois hospital partner, to find the nearest ER or dial 911.

## Other

- **How does Ascension Living manage COVID-19 when federal, state and local guidelines are constantly changing?**

We have a team of experts from nursing, operations, infectious disease, communications and other departments working in many areas so that we are in compliance. The team meets regularly with leaders across our organization to discuss reducing risk of exposure, implementing best practices, educating staff and keeping abreast of new requirements and protocols to keep residents and associates healthy and safe.



- **Overall, are the number of cases going up or down in the Ascension Living communities?**

Since the middle of June, we are fortunately seeing a downward trend in the number of diagnosed cases in our communities.

- **Can we take a family member for a doctor's appointment?**

We are happy to coordinate travel arrangements to required medical appointments for skilled nursing, memory care and assisted living residents through our internal transportation department or medical transport vendor. Independent living residents are able to coordinate their own medical transportation, if the community is in the yellow phase.

- **Is Ascension Living accepting new independent living, assisted living and skilled nursing residents?**

Yes. We are accepting new independent and assisted living residents as long as they quarantine for 14 days. We also have processes in place to ensure safe admission to designated admission units in our skilled nursing facilities.

- **Can residents eat in the dining room in the Orange and Yellow phases?**

Yes. For those communities in Yellow and Orange phases, we are providing a dining experience that is socially distant -- chairs at least 6 feet apart. Residents with a respiratory symptom, even if chronic, should not eat in the dining room. For more information about reopening, please review the Yellow and Orange phased-opening flyers at <https://ascensionliving.org/Resources>

## Questions

- **Who is my point of contact, if I have a question?**

Please contact the Executive Director or Director of Nursing/Clinical Services at your community. If they are unable to answer your question, they will connect you with a resource who can. You can also send questions to [AscensionLiving@ascension.org](mailto:AscensionLiving@ascension.org).