Coronavirus updates

Check this out: Webinar on preventing COVID-19 transmission in Nursing Care Centers

A prerecorded webinar is now available on The Joint Commission’s website to aid nursing care center staff as they continue to treat patients with COVID-19.

The webinar — Preventing Coronavirus Transmission in Nursing Care Centers — provides an overview of the spectrum of clinical presentations of coronavirus and gives specific suggestions for decreasing the risk of transmission in nursing homes.

The webinar includes presentations from Joint Commission experts:

- Sylvia Garcia-Houchins, MBA, RN, CIC, director of infection prevention and control, Division of Healthcare Improvement
- Linda Wilkerson, M.Ed, RN, BC, surveyor
- Beverly M. Belton, MSN, RN, field director, Surveyor Management and Support, Division of Accreditation and Certification Operations

View the full webinar or watch an abridged version of the recording focusing specifically on practical interventions.

Q&A webinar: Get answers on key COVID-19 nursing care center topics

To help nursing care center staff as they confront challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, Joint Commission leaders and experts answered a variety of questions on May 13 during a Q&A webinar.

Located on the COVID-19 resources webpage, topics addressed in the webinar included infection control practices, environment of care and life safety questions, the impact of Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) 1135 waivers on Joint Commission standards, and The Joint Commission’s recovery efforts.

Joint Commission staff that participated in the Q&A were:

- Robert Campbell, PharmD, director, Clinical Standards Interpretation Hospital/Ambulatory Programs, and director, Medication Management, Division of Healthcare Improvement
- Sylvia Garcia-Houchins, MBA, RN, CIC, director, Infection Prevention and Control, Division of Healthcare Improvement
- John Gibson, associate director, Standards Interpretation Group, Division of Healthcare Improvement
- Herman A. McKenzie, MBA, CHSP, director of engineering, Standards Interpretation Group, Division of Healthcare Improvement
- Kelly McCann, associate director, Accreditation and Certification Operations

In this issue:

- Check this out: Webinar on preventing COVID-19 transmission in Nursing Care Centers
- Q&A webinar: Get answers on key COVID-19 nursing care center topics
- Learn what Nursing Care Centers standards are impacted by CMS 1135 waivers
- Executive director blog post: Trying to find the ‘new normal’ in light of COVID-19
- New resources available related to personal protective equipment
- COVID-19 resources available for nursing homes
- National Skilled Nursing Care Week: Joint Commission honors caregivers, shares resources

www.jointcommission.org | Nursing Care Center Accreditation Program
• Linda Seager, RN, MSN, director, Clinical Standards Interpretation Group, Division of Healthcare Improvement
• Jennifer Welch, MBA, associate director, Accreditation and Certification Operations

Register for the next Q&A, which is scheduled for June 1.

Learn what Nursing Care Centers standards are impacted by CMS 1135 waivers
A list of The Joint Commission’s Nursing Care Centers Accreditation standards impacted by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services’ (CMS) 1135 waivers due to the COVID-19 pandemic have been posted to organizations’ Joint Commission Connect® extranet sites. This list may be accessed under the Resources and Tools tab.

Additionally, The Joint Commission and Joint Commission Resources have released a prerecorded webinar explaining the purpose, scope and duration of the 1135 waivers for long-term care facilities, skilled nursing facilities and nursing facilities. It discusses how to request a waiver and review current blanket waivers, as well as provides helpful websites.

Watch the webinar.

Executive director blog post: Trying to find the ‘new normal’ in light of COVID-19
The spread of COVID-19 has led to unprecedented actions across the globe. While everyone is being challenged to find a sense of equilibrium in their homes and personal lives, so too are health care providers as they work to not only save their patients’ lives but also protect themselves.

Gina Zimmermann, executive director of nursing care centers services at The Joint Commission, writes about finding a “new normal” in a Quality in Nursing Center Care blog post. In it, she writes:

“We are reminded every day — actually several times a day in the news media — of rules for social distancing and hyper-vigilant ‘respiratory etiquette.’ We are all being challenged right now, trying to find our ‘new normal’ in our homes and family lives.

“But, there’s really nothing normal for us in our homes right now, nor for our health care provider heroes on the front lines of COVID-19. There’s nothing normal for our patients and residents in nursing homes, either. We are all learning the new rules for keeping our patients and residents in nursing homes safe, and we have heightened concerns for the health and safety of our staff in nursing homes.”

The Joint Commission is interested in the ways that nursing homes are working to help keep their patients, residents and staff safe while combatting COVID-19.

“Tell me how we might help create your ‘new normal’ as we emerge and recover from COVID-19,” Zimmermann wrote.

A subsequent blog post written by Cheryl S. Frenkel, MS, RN, a Joint Commission field reviewer, tackles how nursing homes are meeting needs during the pandemic.

“Though life as we know it has done a 180-degree change from the beginning of the year, there are some steps we can take to make this time less stressful for residents, not to mention staff,” Frenkel wrote.

Those steps are:
• Maintaining family contact
• Hallway activities
• Staff wellness

Read Frenkel’s blog post.
New resources available related to personal protective equipment

The COVID-19 pandemic has placed a spotlight on personal protective equipment (PPE) and what to do if these essential items become scarce.

The Joint Commission previously announced its support for allowing health care staff to bring their own standard face masks or respirators to wear at work when their health care organizations cannot routinely provide access to protective equipment that is commensurate with the risk to which they are exposed.

Some of the reasons The Joint Commission took this position included:

- The degree to which privately-owned masks and respirators will increase the protection of health care workers is uncertain, but the balance of evidence suggests that it is positive.
- No Joint Commission standards or other requirements prohibit staff from using PPE brought from home.
- Homemade masks are an extreme measure and should be used only when standard PPE of proven protective value is unavailable.

Several resources can be found on The Joint Commission’s COVID-19 webpage under the Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) tab, including:

- A video demonstration on how to safely remove a gown in order to prevent infection.
- FAQs on when to use a mask or a respirator and on managing critical shortages of PPE.
- Guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on managing critical shortages of:
  - Eye protection
  - Isolation gowns
  - Face masks
  - N95 respirators
- Guidance from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration on:
  - Conservation of gloves
  - Surgical mask and gown conservation strategies
- Information and guidance on different types of disinfection and sterilization processes.

COVID-19 resources available for nursing homes

We hope you have found this special issue of InTouch helpful. In this time of great uncertainty and challenges, The Joint Commission wants the health care community to know it is here to assist in any way it can.

As you continue to navigate caring for patients during this pandemic, here are some additional resources that can be found on The Joint Commission’s COVID-19 webpage, including:

- FAQs on public health recommendations to prevent the spread of COVID-19 from the community to health care facilities
- Guidance from the CDC on:
  - COVID-19: Long-term Care Facilities and Nursing Homes
  - Mitigate Healthcare Personnel Staffing Shortages
- Guidance for long-term care facilities from CMS
- Respiratory Illness Tracking Tool
- Tips for dementia caregivers during the pandemic from the Alzheimer’s Association

Check out the full list of resources.

Quality and safety

National Skilled Nursing Care Week: Joint Commission honors caregivers, shares resources

This week marks National Skilled Nursing Care Week, and The Joint Commission sends its gratitude and support to the many brave caregivers around the country.

Established by the American Health Care Association in 1967, the week honors the key role that skilled nursing care centers play in health care. This year’s celebration is taking place from May 10-16.
The Joint Commission created a [COVID-19 resource page](https://www.jointcommission.org/covid19/) with information specifically geared to skilled nursing facilities to help them better serve their staff and communities. Found under the “Nursing Care Centers” tab, this section is updated on a regular basis. Some of the latest items include information on:

- 1135 waivers for skilled nursing facilities.
- Prioritization of CMS survey activities.
- An infection control survey tool for nursing homes.
- Issues related to staff health and well-being.