

## DHHS Guidance on Communal Dining/Group Activities for NF and AL

Earlier this week, in response to a question from State Survey Agencies, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), Baltimore Office (Evan Shulman, Director, Division of Nursing Homes, CMS) responded that CMS supports the new guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (March 29, 2021) for nursing and skilled nursing facilities.

The [new CDC guidance](#) continues to emphasize the need of wearing masks, performing frequent hand hygiene and when possible, maintaining physical distancing in communal spaces. Following these measures are important for various reasons including the fact that communal space may include both vaccinated and unvaccinated residents.

Since the CDC recommendations came out, facilities are wondering whether these measures are still applicable if only fully vaccinated residents are involved in communal dining/activities. Therefore, Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), in collaboration with Infection Control Assessment and Promotion Program (ICAP), issues the following guidance for nursing facilities and assisted living communities.

### Communal Dining/Group Activities

#### **1. Best Practice for all residents regardless of their vaccination status (both vaccinated and unvaccinated):**

- a. Maintain six-foot distance or use barriers (e.g., plexiglass) between individuals
- b. Wear face coverings, if tolerated and when possible (e.g., remove for meals)
- c. Perform frequent hand hygiene

#### **2. Alternate Practice when best practice recommendations may not be followed due to a compelling reason (e.g., space restrictions, compassionate care situations and medical reasons such as hearing impairment limiting participation in a group activity):**

##### **a. When all residents in the room are vaccinated or within their 90-day post-COVID period:**

- i. Wear face coverings, if tolerated and when possible (e.g., remove for meals)
- ii. Perform frequent hand hygiene
- iii. Maintain physical distancing to the extent possible given the circumstances

##### **b. When some participating residents in the room are vaccinated, and some are not:**

- i. The unvaccinated residents should:
  - A. Maintain six-foot distance or use barriers (e.g., plexiglass) between individuals
  - B. Wear face coverings, if tolerated and when possible (e.g., remove for meals)
  - C. Perform frequent hand hygiene
- ii. The fully vaccinated residents (or residents within 90-day post-COVID-19) should:
  - A. Wear face coverings, if tolerated and when possible (e.g., remove for meals)
  - B. Perform frequent hand hygiene
  - C. Maintain physical distancing to the extent possible given the circumstances