Best Practices Guide for COVID-19
Infection Control and Prevention in Nursing Homes

As long as the virus that causes COVID-19 continues to spread in communities, it can still spread within nursing homes. Nursing home staff should use best practices for infection prevention to help keep residents, staff, and visitors safe. These practices include limiting high-risk activities (for example, crowded indoor events), wearing a well-fitting mask and using personal protective equipment, keeping distance when higher risk activities are necessary, and getting and staying up to date on COVID-19 vaccination.

Infection control and prevention depends on screening and monitoring, testing, and responding to potential cases, and quarantining and isolating (when appropriate) to minimize spread. At the same time, it is important to recognize that some of these strategies can lead to anxiety, depression, loneliness, and boredom, particularly among older adults.[1] A thoughtful approach to infection control and prevention that follows the latest Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance for nursing homes is needed to ensure safety and wellness.*

INFECTION CONTROL AND PREVENTION ACTIVITIES**

1

Screening & Monitoring

Screening everyone who enters – including employees and visitors – can help control infection by turning away anyone who is symptomatic.

Monitor for common symptoms of COVID-19, such as cough, shortness of breath, loss of smell or taste, and fever.

Nursing home team members should monitor their own health daily, as well as that of residents. If team members do not feel well, they should not come to work.

2

Testing & Responding

Quick testing and responses to possible cases can mean the difference between infection spreading and not spreading.

When potential cases are identified and residents or staff show signs or symptoms of COVID-19, testing quickly is essential. Testing may also be needed to comply with federal and state requirements.

Staff will need to know when testing is indicated, as well as what to do while waiting for test results.

According to the latest CDC guidance, staff who are not up to date with all recommended COVID-19 vaccine doses should adhere to expanded screening testing based on level of community transmission.

3

Quarantine & Isolation

To minimize spread, nursing home staff should follow CDC guidance for isolating or quarantining if an individual tests positive or has a known exposure to a COVID-19 positive individual.

Infection control strategies for providing care to individuals in quarantine or isolation include using proper PPE, including a properly fitted N95 respirator, eye protection, gloves, and gown.

* This Best Practice Guide provides key considerations for infection control and prevention in nursing homes. For complete recommendations, please reference the latest CDC guidance (Interim Infection Prevention and Control Recommendations to Prevent SARS-CoV-2 Spread in Nursing Homes).

** In addition to these infection control and prevention activities, in November 2021, the Biden-Harris Administration issued an emergency regulation requiring COVID-19 vaccination for eligible staff at health care facilities that participate in Medicare and Medicaid programs.

Nursing home staff need clear written policies and procedures for screening, monitoring, testing, and appropriate isolation precautions for all possible and positive COVID-19 cases. To protect residents and staff, nursing home leaders need to develop and implement effective infection control prevention programs that follows the latest CDC guidance for nursing homes. Diagrams like the one below can also provide a visual roadmap and identify actionable steps for screening, monitoring, and testing for COVID-19. Decision tree diagrams give staff clear guidance about how to proceed in different scenarios.

AHRQ
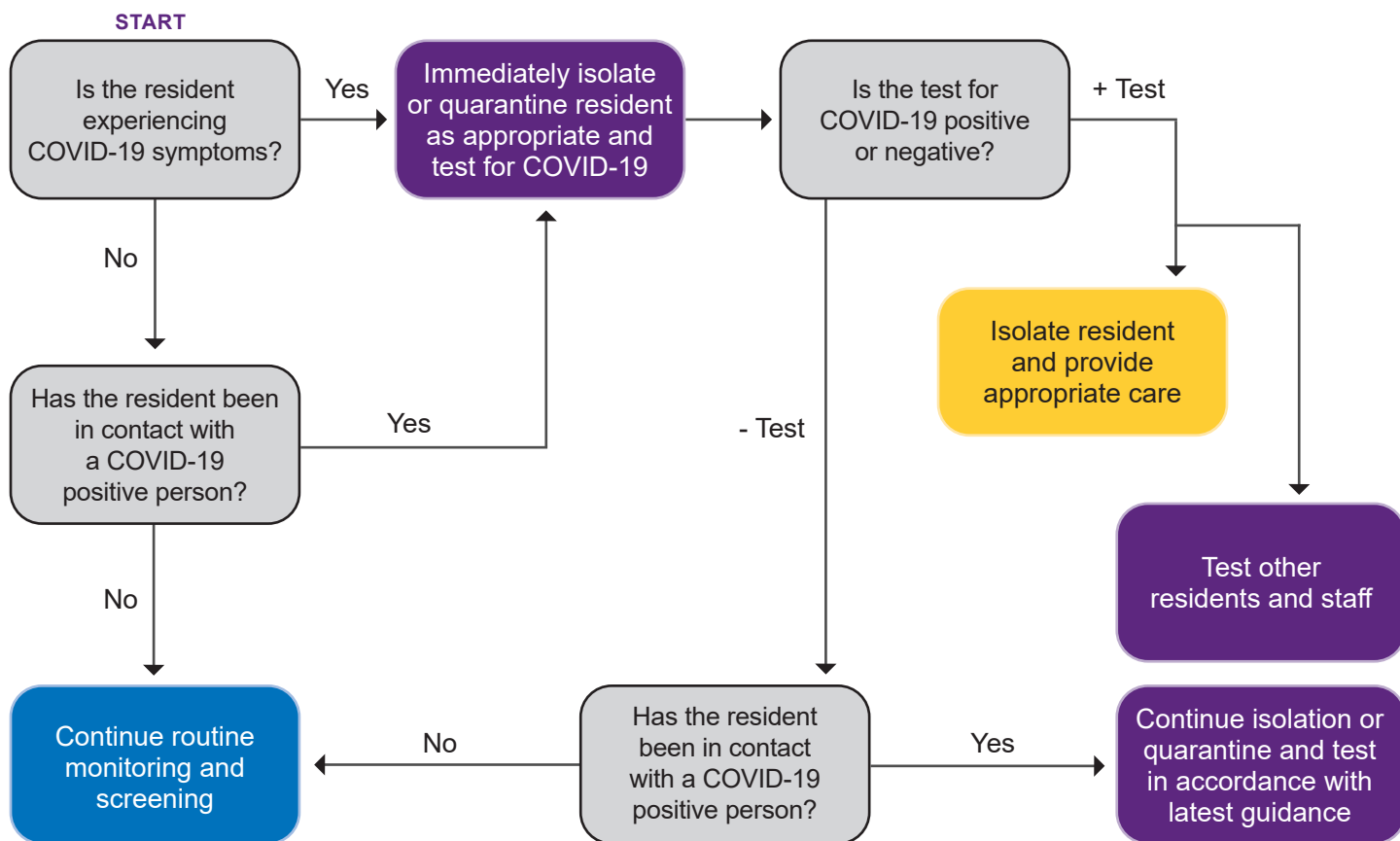Agency for Healthcare
Research and Quality

For example, as illustrated in the sample diagram below, if a resident is showing symptoms of COVID-19 or has had contact with a COVID-19-positive individual, nursing home staff should immediately isolate or quarantine the resident, as appropriate, and test them for COVID-19. The results of the COVID-19 test will indicate what happens next:

- If the test for COVID-19 is positive, nursing home staff should continue to isolate the resident as well as test other residents and staff.
- If the test for COVID-19 is negative and the resident has not been in contact with a COVID-19 positive person, staff can continue routine monitoring and screening.
- If the test for COVID-19 is negative and the resident has been in contact with a COVID-19 positive person, the resident should continue to be tested (regardless of vaccination status) and quarantined (if they are not up to date with all recommended COVID-19 vaccine doses) in accordance with the latest CDC guidance for nursing homes.

It is important to note that this diagram is just a sample. To make appropriate decisions, processes at individual nursing homes will need to include additional details, such as guidance around antigen versus PCR testing results. Nursing home leaders should review federal (Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services) and state requirements, CDC guidance, and their own facility policies.

SAMPLE DECISION TREE: MONITOR RESIDENTS DURING DAILY ENCOUNTERS FOR SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF COVID-19

START

Is the resident experiencing COVID-19 symptoms? — **Yes** → Immediately isolate or quarantine resident as appropriate and test for COVID-19 → Is the test for COVID-19 positive or negative? — **+ Test** → Isolate resident and provide appropriate care → Test other residents and staff → Continue isolation or quarantine and test in accordance with latest guidance

No ↓

Has the resident been in contact with a COVID-19 positive person? — **Yes** → (to Immediately isolate box)

No ↓

Continue routine monitoring and screening ← **No** — Has the resident been in contact with a COVID-19 positive person? — **Yes** → Continue isolation or quarantine and test in accordance with latest guidance

- Test ↓ (from Is the test positive or negative?)

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Additional resources can be found in the AHRQ COVID-19 Nursing Home Resource Catalog, available at: **AHRQ.gov/NHprevention**

What is the difference between quarantine and isolation?

Quarantine separates and restricts the movement of people who have been exposed to a contagious disease to see if they become sick.

Isolation separates people who are sick with a contagious disease from those who are not, to prevent its spread.

AHRQ 22-0016
March 2022
www.ahrq.gov