

Preparing for Respiratory Illness Season

A Guide for Long-term Care

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Long-term care (LTC) facilities play a crucial role in supporting individuals who need assistance with daily activities and ongoing medical care. These facilities include nursing homes, assisted living communities, and other residential care settings designed to meet the needs of elderly individuals, those with chronic illnesses, and people recovering from severe medical conditions.

In recent years, the demand for LTC has increased significantly due to the growing aging population. According to the National Center for Health Statistics, approximately [1.3 million](#) people were residing in nursing homes in the United States in 2020. Additionally, [818,800](#) people were living in residential care communities, which include assisted living facilities.

Respiratory illness season poses a significant threat to older Americans and particularly those living in these communities. Age, declining immune systems, underlying health conditions and close living quarters, put these individuals at a higher risk of contracting infectious respiratory diseases such as COVID-19, flu, and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), among others.

Ahead of respiratory disease season this fall and winter, developing a care plan for vaccination, testing, and treatment can help protect loved ones in LTC facilities from serious illness and make a potentially stressful time more manageable.



Be Aware of a Care Facility's Health and Safety Requirements

Policies and procedures relating to topics like medication management and infection control, among others, vary from facility to facility. Understanding a facility's protocols helps ensure a caregiver or family can support compliance and advocate properly for any health needs or requests. Also, tools like Medicare's [Nursing Home Care Compare](#) compiles information about providers and care facilities based on individual needs.



Keep a List of Medical Issues and Medications

Keep a record of 1) any medical issues the person you are caring for has, 2) a list of current medications, including any vitamins, supplements, or herbs taken regularly, and 3) any drug allergies they may have.



Stay Updated on Vaccinations

Make sure that you and those you care for stay up to date on COVID-19 and flu vaccinations and talk to a healthcare provider about other vaccines that may be needed to protect against severe illness and hospitalization like RSV, pneumococcal disease, or pertussis (whooping cough). Individuals residing in LTC facilities may need additional vaccines due to communal living conditions.



Monitor for Symptoms

Keep an eye out for symptoms of respiratory illness – like a cough, fever, shortness of breath, and sore throat – and seek medical advice early, especially for high-risk individuals like older adults and individuals with certain medical conditions.



Access Treatments

Antiviral drugs can help treat COVID-19 and flu, lessening symptoms and lowering the risk of hospitalization, especially for people at higher risk for serious illness. They are prescription-only treatments that must be given early in illness, so it's important to be prepared and act quickly when the first symptoms of COVID-19 or flu appear. Talk to the providers at the care facility to determine if an antiviral treatment is an option for those you are caring for, and if it is readily accessible.



Stay Informed

Follow the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#) for the latest information on respiratory illness season and discuss any questions with a healthcare provider.