
Strategies used to prevent the spread of COVID-19 are especially difficult for residents with dementia living in long-term care communities, such as nursing homes, certified Alzheimer’s units or memory care facilities.

Residents with dementia may have an impaired ability to follow or remember instructions. Staff may need to provide additional support and closer supervision to ensure infection control procedures are followed such as:

➤ **Refraining from touching their face**

- Ensure the skin on the resident’s face is clean and moisturized, not dry and irritated.
- Ensure eyeglasses are clean and comfortable.
- Ensure men are shaven, if they shave regularly.
- Ensure there are no sores or other causes of pain within the mouth, and that regular oral hygiene is completed.
- Ensure lips are adequately hydrated, and not chapped or dry.
- Provide activities that keep the resident’s hands engaged in purposeful movement such as sorting cards or colored poker chips

➤ **Practicing hand hygiene**

- Place residents on a supervised hand hygiene schedule. Have staff provide demonstration and encouragement while washing their own hands or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Encourage residents to sing a song to remind them to wash their hands or use hand sanitizer for at least 20 seconds.
- If the resident is unable to complete hand hygiene on their own or with prompting, wear gloves to perform this task for the person.
- Be sure to use moisturizer on clean hands as needed to ensure they do not get dry and irritated.
- Put dementia-friendly instructional signs with pictures on the bathroom window or wall reminding everyone to wash their hands.



➤ **Wearing a mask**

- It may be difficult or impossible to get a resident with dementia to wear a face mask; therefore, it is important that staff wear masks as indicated.
- Allow residents to see your face and hear your voice before putting on the mask so they can connect with you first and provide visual clues if they are unable to hear you well.
- Utilizing stickers, such as smiley faces, or creating funny characters or animals like cats and dogs on the front of the masks in such a way as to maintain the integrity of the mask, may encourage residents to wear them or at least bring a smile to their face when worn by staff. Do not use if residents find these decorated masks distressing.



➤ **Refraining from placing things in their mouth**

- Make sure dangerous items are out of reach.
- Make sure items in reach are non-toxic or edible.
- Provide increased supervision when residents are working with items that may pose a choking hazard.
- Ensure residents are provided regular meals and snacks with options of items they can combine such as cheese and crackers.
- Sanitize items regularly.
- Check for any oral or dental problems such as loose-fitting dentures

➤ **Keeping residents in safe areas**

- Provide residents with safe spaces to wander. Consider placing familiar items around residents who wander to reduce any anxiety caused by unfamiliar environments.
- Use visual prompts to remind residents of restricted access.
- Secure the perimeter of unsafe areas with security personnel or other security systems.
- Provide distraction through supervised and structured daily activities, including some form of daily exercise, such as individual walks outside with staff members.



➤ **Maintaining social distancing**

- Increase one-on-one structured programming throughout the day.
- Create more opportunities for engagement and stimulation in residents' rooms including: manicures/pedicures; establishing a craft corner or reading nook; making a child care station; working with residents to redecorate their rooms; bringing in seed starters to celebrate spring, or a small fish tank for animal lovers.
- Take greater advantage of outdoor spaces for walking and visiting at a safe distance.
- Residents should be encouraged to eat in their rooms. For those who refuse, consider spreading out dining to various areas and/or staggering dining service to allow for more one-on-one assistance for those who need it.
- Encourage visiting with loved ones via phone or video chatting, through windows with telephones or through outside drive-by visits where they can visit from their cars.
- Ensure that needed adaptive devices, such as hearing aids and eyeglasses, are available to the resident when communicating and visiting from a distance.



Everyone living with a dementia will respond to this situation differently. Be prepared to try a variety of approaches to help residents feel safe and reassured.

It is highly recommended that any changes in routine, environment, and daily structure for residents with dementia be kept to a minimum to reduce the incidence of agitation or aggression.

Standard calming techniques, such as distraction and redirection should be used if needed including:

- Playing personalized music
- Dancing
- Taking the person for a walk outside
- Engaging the resident in a favorite task
- Folding towels that can be washed
- Reminiscing using photos in plastic sleeves that can be easily sanitized



If residents express concern about the pandemic, staff should:

- provide simple, truthful answers to their questions from reliable sources.
- take the time to listen to the person and their concerns, validate their feelings, and provide reassurance explaining that everyone is doing all they can to help.
- break down required tasks and guide residents step-by-step through the process, prompting with words or pictures as needed.
- consider minimizing the flow of media information by turning off the 24-hour news cycle on TV in shared areas. Ask news watchers to do so in their rooms.
- not discuss their own anxieties and opinions in front of residents.

Now, more than ever, staff's knowledge of the residents is so important. Putting the person before the task allows every task to be an opportunity for engagement. Person-centered care decreases disruptive behaviors which may occur due to inconsistencies in daily routines, boredom, loneliness, or a sense of helplessness, therefore helping to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

NOTE: Suggestions in this handout are subject to all federal, state and local rules and regulations. We encourage you to stay current with CDC and Texas Department of State Health Services recommendations as well as with any additional guidance from CMS and Texas HHSC that may be applicable to your setting.