The purpose of this document is to provide guidelines to allow residents the opportunity to restore visitation on a limited basis during the COVID-19 pandemic while adhering to recommended  U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs (VA), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), and Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) guidelines. The Soldiers’ Homes in Chelsea and Holyoke recognize how difficult it has been to stay connected during this time while we all adhere to strict precautions to stop the spread of the virus. Public health experts have now determined that outside visitation is safe when certain infection control protocols and precautions, such as social distancing and face coverings, are strictly followed.

The Soldiers’ Homes in Chelsea and Holyoke will begin to allow outside visitation for the residents of their Long Term Care and Skilled Nursing Facility residents, utilizing the guidance below, one week after the start of Phase 2 Reopening, unless conditions in the Home prior to that date indicate an increasing prevalence of suspected or confirmed COVID cases among staff or residents, or safe staffing levels cannot be maintained to support outdoor visitation.

**Outdoor Visitation Overview:**

The Homes may allow in-person visitation. Visitation must occur in a designated outdoor visitation space, and the Homes’ protocols must include the following safety, care, and infection control measures:

* A resident who is suspected or confirmed to be infected with COVID-19 cannot be visited. A resident who has never had COVID-19 or has recovered from COVID-19 may be visited.
* Transport of a resident to and from the designated outdoor visitation space must be safe and orderly. At a minimum, safe transport means that the resident cannot be transported through any space designated as COVID-19 care space or space where residents suspected or confirmed to be infected with COVID-19 are present.
* A staff member trained in such patient safety and infection control measures must remain with the resident at all times during the visit.
* Visitors are limited to no more than two individuals. Visitors must remain at least 6 feet from the resident.
* Social Distancing shall be adhered to at all times while on campus.
* Visitors will not be allowed entry into the Home for any reason.
* Staff and residents must wear a surgical face mask and visitors must wear a face covering or mask for the duration of the visit.
* Smoking is prohibited.
* Outside food is prohibited.

**Visitor Screening**

* Visitations will not be permitted with any visitors who are currently under isolation because they are presumed or confirmed COVID-19 positive or quarantined because of close or household contact.
* All visitors will be screened prior to visiting with a resident.
  + Visitors are not permitted to visit if they have symptoms of COVID-19, including fever, cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, muscle pain, chills, or new loss of taste or smell.
  + Anyone with a fever (100.0 F or higher) **will not be permitted to visit** the home.
  + Visitors are not permitted to visit if they have tested positive for COVID-19 in the past 14 days or if they have been ordered by a health care professional or public health official to quarantine due to exposure.
* Any individual who participates in a visitation will be educated on COVID symptoms and a procedure for notifying the Soldiers' Home if they develop symptoms within two days after the visit. If any visitor develops signs and symptoms of COVID-19 such as fever, cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, muscle pain, chills, or new onset loss of smell or taste within 2 days after the visitation will be instructed to immediately notify the Home of the date they were on site, the individuals they were in contact with, and the location where the visit occurred.
* The Home will immediately screen any resident and staff who had contact with the visitor for the level of exposure and follow up with medical staff or the resident’s care provider.

**Face Masks and Infection Control**

* All visitors are required to wear a face covering or mask during the visit. If a visitor refuses the visitation must be canceled.
  + Visitors should bring their own face covering, in order to preserve the program’s Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) supply. However, if a visitor does not have a face covering, one will be provided.
* Residents will also be required to wear face coverings in order to participate in visitation. If the Resident refuses, their record is to be updated with Resident refusal and visitation must be canceled.
* Residents must be medically and clinically cleared for a visit.
* Hand hygiene shall be required upon entry to the visitation area; hand sanitizer will be available.
* All visitors must maintain social distancing (6 feet) from staff and residents at all times.
* If the outdoor visitation area includes chairs, tables, or a picnic bench, all surfaces should be disinfected as required by CDC protocols for a health care facility after each visit. *Center for Clinical Standards and Quality/Quality, Safety & Oversight Group. QSO-20-20-All. March 23, 2020”.*<https://www.cms.gov/files/document/qso-20-20-all.pdf>.  CDC, Long Term Care Facilities: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/long-term-care.html>

**Scheduling Visits in Advance**

* The Home may limit the length of any visit, the days on which visits will be permitted, the hours during a day when visits will be permitted, and the number of times during a day or week a resident may be visited.
* Visits must be scheduled in advance to allow coordination with others that may also want to visit and to ensure appropriate staffing levels. Details on scheduling will be provided to families.
* Visits will be limited to no more than 30 minutes to limit exposure and to ensure that staff can assist with the visit as required. Visits will be limited to no more than 1 visit per week per resident to allow for sufficient time to observe residents for any symptoms between visits.
* The Home will continue to support alternative electronic methods for communication between residents and visitors, such as Skype, FaceTime, and Zoom.

**Visitation Policies Subject to Change**

* Failure to adhere to these guidelines may require the termination of the visit and may result in a temporary ban on visitation.
* The Home may have to change this policy with little notice as required by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health or the local board of health.
* The Home may prohibit visitation on a case-by-case basis, if a resident or staff tests positive or shows symptoms of illness, or it is determined visitation cannot safely be accommodated for residents, visitors, or staff.
* Visitation to all residents may be temporarily suspended if conditions in the Soldiers’ Homes indicate an increasing prevalence of suspected or positive COVID-19 cases among staff or residents.
* Visitation to all residents may be temporarily suspended if there is not adequate staffing to ensure patient safety and infection control at the Soldiers’ Home as determined by the clinical leadership at each of the Homes.

**Additional Resources**

We encourage all visitors to monitor the MA DPH and CDC websites for up-to-date information and resources:

* DPH’s website provides up-to-date information on COVID-19 in Massachusetts: <https://www.mass.gov/2019coronavirus>.
* CDC website: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/healthcare-facilities/index.html>