

March 16, 2020

Communal Dining

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) are responsible for ensuring the health and safety of nursing home residents by enforcing the standards required to help each resident attain or maintain their highest level of well-being. In light of the recent spread of COVID-19, they are providing additional guidance to nursing homes to help control and prevent the spread of the virus. The CMS memo dated March 13, 2020, provided additional guidance to cancel communal dining and all group activities, such as internal and external group activities.

While it is a challenging recommendation, the CMS memo indicates that communities should take steps to comply. This must be viewed on a community to community, and day to day basis depending on physical plant, staff availability, and resident centered specific needs.

Until we receive further guidance or clarification on communal dining from CMS, the following are suggested approaches for implementing social distancing to current dining practices:

1. Identify residents who are high-risk for choking, residents who are at risk for aspiration or those residents who must require full or partial assistance or assisted while eating. This would also include residents who have physician ordered modified diets due to diagnosis of dysphagia.
2. Meals for these residents should be provided in a place where there is constant supervision.
3. If the designated area is the dining room, attempt to provide social distancing from other residents with a minimum of 6 feet between them and any other resident *if possible*.
4. Staff members who are providing the assistance, must perform hand hygiene when alternating between residents. If no resident contact, hand sanitizer can be used.
5. Provide in room meal service for residents assessed to be capable of safely feeding themselves.
6. If possible, increase the number of meal services offer meals in shifts to allow residents to be at table by themselves or allow for social distancing.
7. Offer hand sanitizer and cleaning wipes in communal dining areas to allow for proper hand hygiene prior to and after meal service.
8. Provide regular routine services as feasible: use regular table and flatware, keep menu offering the same and pass HS snacks which may provide comfort. Use discretion for disposables which are permitted.
9. Continue to have strict handwashing in the kitchen and service areas, monitor dish machine sanitation levels closely (every shift measure PPM), and keep sanitizing buckets at proper sanitation levels.
10. Use hand sanitizer between room tray passes.

11. Staff providing assistance with feeding patients should be wearing a disposable mask. This mask may be worn for an extended period of time, at least throughout an entire meal session (i.e., it does not need to be changed when switching between residents).

We sincerely apologize for this inconvenience, but we must abide by these guidelines and implement the precautions to protect the health and safety of residents and staff.