












VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF
SOCIAL SERVICES




Tips and Best Practices for Reopening Communal Dining in Assisted Living Facilities

The Virginia Department of Health (VDH) recommends that long-term care facilities do not reopen until all residents and staff members receive a single baseline COVID-19 test. VDSS has compiled tips and best practices to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Each individual facility should make its decision based on an assessment of its own specific circumstances. This does not diminish the responsibility of assisted living facilities to safely provide care and services to residents and follow existing COVID-19 health and safety guidance.








General Guidance

-  Restrict communal dining to COVID-19 negative and asymptomatic residents or residents meeting the criteria for [discontinuation of transmission-based precautions](#).
-  Offer residents alternative dining opportunities, such as eating in their rooms or another designated area in the facility, if they are COVID-19 positive or symptomatic, have been exposed to the virus, or are uncomfortable with communal dining.
-  Quarantine residents exposed to the virus in their rooms for up to 14 days.
-  Residents who require supervision while eating should never be left unattended during meal times regardless of where meals are served.
-  Prohibit visitors from eating in the dining room with residents.
-  Prohibit use of buffets and self-serving beverage stations.
-  Stagger mealtimes with fewer residents per meal if dining space does not allow six feet of separation between residents.
-  Consider using rolled silverware and eliminating table presets. Use proper infection control protocols prior to rolling silverware and setting tables.
-  Residents should wear a face covering or face mask at all times except while eating.

Dining Room

-  Clearly mark tables not being used for residents as out of service.
-  Staff members should wear a face mask and gloves at all times.
-  Stagger entrance and exit points to eliminate multiple residents and staff entering and exiting at the same time. If staggering is not possible, ensure all residents have exited prior to allowing more residents to enter.

Dining Service

-  Use staff-facilitated seating and seat the same residents together for each meal, which will assist in tracking residents potentially exposed.
-  Assign staff to the same tables each meal.
-  Use single-use disposable items as frequently as possible (i.e. menus, single-use condiment packets).
-  Consider removing reusable condiments. A designated staff member can assist residents with condiments.
-  Clean reusable condiment containers with EPA-registered cleaning agents prior to each meal service and prior to residents entering dining areas.
-  A dedicated staff assigned to specific residents should remove all items from the table when residents leave the dining area and ensure all surfaces, including chairs and touch points, are properly sanitized with EPA-registered cleaning agents.
-  Staff members assisting residents with eating should wash their hands and change gloves between residents.

Additional Resources:

- [Communities, Schools, Workplaces, and Events](#)
- [VDH Nursing Home Reopening Guidance FAQs](#)
- [CMS Nursing Home Reopening Recommendations \(5/18/2020\)](#)
- [VDH Cleaning and Disinfection Tips for COVID-19](#)
- [List N: Disinfectants for Use Against SARS-CoV-2 \(COVID-19\)](#)

Contact your licensing inspector if additional guidance is needed.