

Safe Visiting

For most of us a cold, or even the flu, poses nothing more than a minor inconvenience, some time at home in bed, and maybe a trip to see your physician. For residents and tenants in long-term care settings, however, coming down with the flu can be life threatening. Compromised immune systems and respiratory or cardiac issues can become more than just a challenge. Because of this, it is important to think about how a safe environment can be maintained while at the same time allowing for visitors and social activities.

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the best way to avoid getting the flu and transmitting it to others is to be immunized every year. The CDC cautions that individuals should be immunized as soon as the vaccines are released and reminds people that they are not fully effective until approximately two weeks after the immunization.

What you can do.

Besides being immunized, one very basic way to help keep people in long-term care safe is to refrain from visiting if you or anyone in your immediate home environment is ill and has flu-like symptoms. These symptoms include, but are not limited to:

- fever (often high)
- headache
- extreme tiredness
- dry cough
- sore throat
- runny or stuffy nose
- muscle aches
- stomach symptoms, including nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea

If you must visit, practice the following universal precautions:

- Cover your mouth or nose when coughing or sneezing
- Wash your hands often
- Don't touch your eyes, nose or mouth
- Avoid shaking hands with others
- Wear a mask if you have any doubts about your own health as well as to avoid exposure to others while in the facility

While it is impossible to avoid exposure to colds and the flu, these simple steps can help keep others safe.

The mission of the Office of the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman is to protect the health, safety, welfare, and rights of individuals residing in long-term care by investigating complaints, seeking resolutions to problems, and providing advocacy with the goal of enhancing quality of life and care.