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Holiday Considerations and Guidance During Influenza Season and the COVID-19 Pandemic

Nov. 19, 2020

As the holiday season is upon us, FMDA – The Florida Society for Post-Acute and Long-Term Care Medicine, would like to take this opportunity to wish you a safe and happy holiday season and remind everyone to be mindful of some important health considerations. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on frail and elderly populations, especially those who live in long-term-care settings. When considering your plans for the upcoming holidays, we advise everyone to follow CDC and CMS guidance, be familiar with the 14-day rolling trends for COVID-19 in your area, and check for updates regarding gatherings from the Florida Department of Health and your County Health Department.

For Residents of Long-Term Care:

Prior to attending any holiday gatherings please discuss the risk, benefits, and alternatives with the resident's primary care team and facility staff:

- Ask if any current quarantines are in place for the facility and if your loved one has had any recent symptoms of or exposure to COVID-19
- Consider the potential health risks of your loved one should they leave the facility
- Understand the state of Florida's long-term-care residents' rights and other considerations, such as the impact of social isolation on seniors
- Ask if there are alternatives to leaving the facility – such as outdoor visitation for essential visitors, home cooked meal delivery, or virtual interaction
- Know the risk of in person celebrations, especially with large groups of people, including the possibility of bringing the virus back into the facility, increasing the risk of hospitalization, and death to other residents and staff
- FMDA strongly recommends that all residents entering or re-entering a post-acute or long-term-care facility be tested for COVID-19 prior to admission/readmission and quarantine for 14 days following return from a holiday gathering

For all vulnerable individuals, including nursing home residents as well as those living in the community, their families, and caregivers:

- Discuss with your Primary Care Physician or Practitioner the measures you need to take to decrease the risk associated with holiday gatherings
- Remember that physical distancing of 6 feet, frequent hand washing, universal mask wearing, and flu shots can save lives

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- Consider the potential health risks of your loved ones from exposure to COVID-19
- Think about other health considerations, such as the impact of social isolation on seniors
- Recognize how you can decrease the risk of transmission by modifying your gatherings, such as limiting to single households, restricting to 10 or less attendees, observing a 14-day advanced quarantine for those traveling from out of town, viral testing for all attendees prior to gathering, holding your event outdoors, maintaining 6 feet of physical space between attendees, universal masking (except when eating or drinking), frequent hand washing, and disinfecting of surfaces
- Avoid allowing guests in food preparation areas, buffet serving, and shared food containers for foods such as nuts or chips
- Do not including any person(s) with recent symptoms of or exposure to COVID-19
- Get creative and consider alternatives such as the use of virtual technology, delivering your loved one food in safe containers with notes of gratitude, or postponing the holiday gathering
- Get your flu shots

Resources:

- CDC Thanksgiving and Gatherings <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/holidays.html>
- FL Department of Health Data <https://floridahealthcovid19.gov>
- AMDA - The Society for Post-Acute and Long-Term Care Medicine. COVID-19 Resources <https://paltc.org/COVID-19>
- FMDA - The Florida Society for Post-Acute and Long-Term Care Medicine. COVID-19 Library <https://www.fmda.org/covid-19.php>
- AARP Nursing Home Dashboard <https://www.aarp.org/caregiving/nursing-homes/>

For more information, please contact FMDA at (561) 689-6321 or info@fmda.org.