Long-Term Care Residents: 
Rights and Resources

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the World is taking precautions to minimize health complications. This is especially important for the most vulnerable populations. According to the Oklahoma State Department of Health (“OSDH”), current data indicates the risk of death for those contracting COVID-19 increases for individuals above the age of 60 or for individuals with autoimmune conditions or serious chronic medical conditions. This means that people in nursing homes and other senior-related housing are at a HIGHER risk of death* (emphasis added).

What are Rights for Seniors During COVID-19?

The OSDH is advising to:

• Screen staff and anyone coming to the facility – even recommending temperature checks prior to each shift.
• Immediately isolate any staff or residents that show signs or symptoms.
• Cancel communal dining and all group activities, or stagger dining times for social distancing.
• Provide alternate means of communication for residents and families.
• Encourage and practice infection control policies and procedures (including hand hygiene, cough etiquette, and cleaning work supplies and medical equipment).
• Continually review and implement CDC and OSDH Guidelines.

The CDC is advising to:

• Wear Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) where resident care is provided, and discard PPE prior to leaving the resident’s room or providing care for another resident in the same room.
• Consider implementing a respiratory protection program that is compliant with the OSHA respiratory protection standard for employees.
• Use EPA-registered, hospital-grade disinfectants.
• Wear a cloth face covering in public settings where other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain (e.g., grocery stores and pharmacies), especially in areas of significant community-based transmission.

Visitors are discouraged. They may be restricted for reasonable clinical and safety reasons or denied, especially if they are showing signs or symptoms of a transmissible
infection (following Governor Stitt’s Executive Order 2020-06 and President Trump’s Declaration of a National Public Health Emergency).

- Law enforcement should be notified when visitors access without authorization.
- Nonessential healthcare personnel (including consultant personnel) and volunteers should be restricted from entering the building.

The Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program is still in operation, but working remotely. An Ombudsman attempts to resolve complaints between residents and facilities, and has the authority to explore problems and recommend corrective action to the facility. The Ombudsman Program is still able to assist seniors and their families in nursing homes, assisted living, and similar adult care homes.

- To receive assistance from the Ombudsman Program during COVID-19 precautions, you must leave a message and expect a delay.
  - Primary OKC office: 1-405-521-6734; or
  - Local Area Agency on Aging 1-800-211-2116 (toll-free)
    - Ask for your county’s phone number if you are not automatically routed.

If you or your loved one need civil (non-criminal) legal help or do not understand your legal rights, feel free to contact Legal Aid Services of Oklahoma. Legal Aid provides help to people who are low-income and seniors.

- To apply for assistance, either:
  - Call 1-888-534-5243. The Application line is open Monday-Thursday from 9:00 a.m. – noon and 1:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.
  - OKLegalConnect.org

**Resources**

- Legal Aid Services of Oklahoma, https://www.legalaidok.org/
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), https://www.cdc.gov/
- The National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care, https://theconsumervoice.org/
- Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), www.osha.gov
- Oklahoma Long-Term Care Ombudsman, http://www.okdhs.org/services/aging/Pages/ombudsman.aspx
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), https://www.epa.gov/

*Accurate from date of publication (April 10th, 2020).*