

Top 10 ways Ascension Living puts “safety first” with COVID-19

Debra Valkenberg, RN, BC-RAC-CT, Chief Nursing Officer, Ascension Living, lists the ways clinical teams focus on “safety first” at all of our communities — following the strictest infection-control guidelines and implementing “best practices” based on research to protect residents, staff members and visitors.

1. Proactively conducting tests on residents and associates

We continue to conduct tests when necessary, based on initial test results; federal and state health department guidelines; or as needed per new signs or symptoms. We have a sufficient amount of test kits for periodically screening residents and associates. We learn test results in 2-3 days.

2. Screening associates daily

We screen associates and essential healthcare partners in our communities with a series of questions and a temperature check at the start of— and halfway through — every shift to minimize the spread of infection. If associates show any signs or symptoms, they are sent home to quarantine for 14 days and 72 hours symptom-free.

3. Following strict communicable-disease protocols

We have in place strict infection-control precautions and protocols set by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC); Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS); and state and local health department guidelines — which vary by state. When guidelines change, and they often do, we have to quickly adapt to new processes within our communities, and train associates.

4. Educating and training associates

Our clinical teams are continually focused on educating and training our associates on infection-control guidelines. This includes how to wear protective personal equipment (PPE), and practice good hand hygiene. And of course our commitment extends to food safety, cleaning and disinfecting, social distancing at 6 feet, and other protocols to help prevent or quickly break the chain of infection.

5. Collaborating with in-house experts

COVID-19 guidelines and processes are changing as we learn more about this virus. We have a team of experts from nursing, operations, infectious disease, communications and other departments who collaborate and meet regularly with leaders. They discuss how to reduce risk of exposure; implement best practices; keep abreast of the latest guidelines; keep residents healthy and connected; and provide continuing associate education.

6. Adhering to stringent cleaning and disinfecting

Our environmental services teams perform ongoing rigorous disinfecting measures at all of our communities — following infection-prevention policies.

7. Testing positive

Any **resident** with a positive test or who is symptomatic is isolated in accordance with guidance from the CDC. If a skilled nursing facility resident tests positive, he or she is cared for by designated, specially trained healthcare personnel who do not interact with other residents or units within the community.

Associates who test positive adhere to established infection-control protocols with guidance from the CDC, CMS and local health departments. They remain off work (furloughed) until cleared by the associate’s provider and Associate Health Department. Ascension is committed to protecting the pay of associates during this time of disruption from COVID-19.

8. Requiring universal masking

We require all associates and clinical partners to wear a face mask when working within our communities. We are equipped with proper PPE — face masks, gloves, gowns and face shields for associates and face masks for residents.

9. Reopening slowly and safely

During COVID-19, we have established operational and safety precautions for residents and visitors as we reopen — outlined in our Yellow and Orange phased-opening flyers found online at ascensionliving.org/resources. These flyers (listing precautions) are subject to change.

10. Providing compassionate, safe care

During the pandemic and beyond, we are committed to keeping residents safe and healthy while they receive care from us. “Safety first” is our top priority.

We are accepting new residents. To learn more about our safety measures, visit us online at ascensionliving.org/resources.

