

NEWS RELEASE | **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE** | November 25, 2020

CMS approves extra leave days for ND Medicaid clients who live in nursing homes and choose to visit family for the holidays

BISMARCK, N.D. – The State of North Dakota and nursing homes have worked together for many months to contain the spread of COVID-19 in facilities, while also helping families and residents connect through technology, outdoor visits and other options when possible.

As it continues to explore ways to keep families connected to their loved ones, the North Dakota Department of Human Services received some welcome news from its federal partners. Yesterday the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) approved extra leave days for North Dakota Medicaid participants who live in skilled nursing facilities and choose to leave their facility temporarily to visit family members.

Typically nursing home residents who are enrolled in Medicaid can leave a facility for up to 24 days every year without losing their bed. Today's decision by CMS doubles the number of leave days to 48 days during the public health emergency. With the added days, a resident who is picked up on Thanksgiving Day could stay with family to enjoy New Year's Day.

"I encourage Medicaid clients and families who are interested in this new flexibility to talk to each other and the nursing home provider about the risks and benefits," said Department of Human Services Executive Director Chris Jones. "While we all must do our part this holiday season to adhere to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines to help slow the spread of the virus, we support the right of residents to leave their nursing homes temporarily and celebrate the holidays together with their family members."

CMS has provided recommendations should Medicaid clients choose to leave the nursing home:

- Limit close contact (maintain physical distancing of at least six feet), keep gatherings as small as possible, and use technology to engage with others remotely;
- Wear face masks or cloth face coverings at all times (including in cars, homes, restaurants, etc.);
- Limit contact with commonly touched surfaces or shared items;
- Verbally greet others instead of shaking hands or giving hugs;
- Follow food safety tips such as avoiding communal serving utensils, passing food, potluck or buffet style food service and instead opt for individually prepared plates by a single server;
- Wash hands with soap and water or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer frequently;
- Avoid large gatherings, crowded areas and high-risk activities such as singing;
- For those attending a gathering, avoid contact with individuals outside of their household for 14 days prior to the gathering; and
- Ask anyone who has signs or symptoms of COVID-19 or who has been exposed to someone diagnosed with COVID-19, to not attend the gathering.

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For more recommendations and ideas, visit the CDC's [webpage on holiday celebrations](#).

Individuals returning from family visits will need to quarantine for 14 days upon returning to their nursing facilities to protect the health and well-being of other residents. This requirement has not changed.

The department reminds North Dakotans that individuals who qualify for nursing home care can successfully live at home in the community if they choose.

To learn more about community living options, interested long-term care residents who participate in Medicaid and their families can contact North Dakota's Aging and Disability Resources Link toll-free at 1-855-462-5465, 711 (TTY), weekdays between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. CT, or by emailing carechoice@nd.gov. The information and referral line also has an online database of services at <https://carechoice.nd.assistguide.net/>.

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