



To: To All Residents, Family Members and Staff  
From: Vernon M. Baker, President/CEO  
Stephanie Clontz, Director of Resident Services/ HC Administrator  
Date: December 22, 2021  
Re: Health Center Visitation

As we approach the Christmas and New Year celebrations and learn more about the COVID-19 Omicron variant, we want to update you regarding visitation options available to Health Center residents and their visitors. As you likely recall, visitation in our Health Center (HC) was prohibited for many months, but both the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) significantly relaxed restrictions on visitation in the spring of 2021 in light of the high rate of vaccinations among nursing home residents. Then, in November 2021, both CMS and the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NC DHHS) officially ended visitor restrictions and now require licensed facilities to allow indoor visitation for all residents without restrictions. Even so, they both emphasize that we cannot relax our infection control practices and must be vigilant about masking, distancing, and hand-washing.

Masking, distancing and hand-washing are particularly critical with the rapid rise of the Omicron variant. According to the November 19, 2021 [NC DHHS guidance](#), the community level of transmission should be evaluated to determine the stringency of face coverings and physical distancing. At this time, Mecklenburg County and the surrounding counties are at a high level of transmission, so we are requiring all residents and visitors, even those who are fully vaccinated, to wear masks and physically distance at all times during visitation.

Please be patient with our HC staff as we are required to continue to screen all visitors to determine if they are experiencing any COVID-19 symptoms, have tested positive for COVID-19, or meet the criteria for quarantine.

### **Visitation Methods**

At this time, HC residents and their visitors have the following options for visitations.

- **Indoor Visits** – Visits in resident rooms and designated visiting areas are permitted. Visitors should only go into the room of the resident you are visiting or to the designated visiting area.
- **Outdoor Visits** – these can occur when the weather is comfortable for the resident, taking into consideration, for example, temperature, wind, cloud cover. Even for fully vaccinated residents (which means two or more weeks have passed since the second dose of the vaccine), outdoor visitation is preferred

according to CMS and NC DHHS because the risk of transmission is much higher for indoor visits.

- **Window Visits** – if requested, these can be offered at one location in Nursing Care and one location in Assisted Living. During these visits, the visitor and resident see each other through a window, but the visitor remains outside, the resident stays inside and communication is facilitated by use of an intercom.

### **Additional Helpful Information**

- The Pines must follow guidance issued by the government (federal, state and county) with respect to the procedures it establishes for visitation in nursing and assisted living.
- Indoor visitation presents a risk that you will transmit COVID-19 to the resident you are visiting or will contract COVID-19. We ask that you strictly abide by all of our guidelines to help reduce the risk of transmitting COVID-19 to the extent possible.
- Residents or family members who have concerns or questions about visitation, care or PPE are encouraged to contact The Pines' Director of Nursing (Judy Green), Social Worker (Kayla Mainzer) or Health Center Administrator (Stephanie Clontz). If you have further concerns after speaking with The Pines' staff, you may contact the Regional Ombudsman, Lindsay Tice, with Centralina Area Agency on Aging (1-800-508-5777).

Like you, we are disappointed that the Omicron variant is spreading through the US at the holidays. We are grateful for high vaccination rates at The Pines, including boosters, but they may not protect us completely from the Delta or Omicron variants, and we need to stay vigilant. We will update you if the guidance changes.