
Long-term Care Facility Therapy Animal Visitation Guidance

Many long-term care residents have experienced isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic and may benefit from interacting with therapy animals. The risk of animals transmitting COVID-19 to people is considered to be low based on the limited research available. More studies are needed to learn if and how different animals could be affected by COVID-19. In some situations, it appears that people can spread COVID-19 to animals. If therapy animals are invited to a long-term care facility, consider the following guidance:

Therapy Animal Guidelines

- Staff and residents who are not vaccinated should not interact with the therapy animal.
- If there is a COVID-19 outbreak in the facility or a resident or staff member has symptoms consistent with COVID-19, the therapy animal may not visit the facility.
- If therapy animals are sick, have respiratory symptoms, or have tested positive for COVID-19, do not bring therapy animals to visit and keep them home.
- If the therapy animal, or the animal's handler, has an exposure to COVID-19, the handler should not bring the therapy animal to the facility.
- If the therapy animal handler is a staff member of the facility, the animal handler should be tested at the same frequency as the facility's surveillance testing. The animal handler would be considered a volunteer and should be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 and tested at the same frequency as the facility's surveillance testing.
- Use a large room or, preferably, a designated area outdoors for visits with the therapy animal instead of going room-to-room with the animal.
- Physically distance therapy animals at least 6 feet away from people and other animals not participating in the visit.
- Handlers and anyone having contact with therapy animals should wash their hands before and after every contact.
- Residents and staff interacting with therapy animals should wear masks and follow the facility's personal protective equipment (PPE) protocols. Gloves are optional as direct contact may maximize therapeutic interaction with the animal.
- Do not put masks on therapy animals. Covering an animal's face could harm the animal.
- Do not use items that multiple people handle between therapy visits (for example, leashes, harnesses, toys, or blankets). If items like leashes must be brought between facilities, disinfect them after each use.
- Disinfect items such as toys, collars, leashes, harnesses, therapy vests and scarves, and food/water bowls frequently.

- Do not let other people handle items that go into the animal’s mouth, such as toys and treats. Only the handler may handle these items with handwashing.
- Do not allow therapy animals to lick or give ‘kisses’ to others.
- Do not wipe or bathe a therapy animal with chemical disinfectants, alcohol, hydrogen peroxide, or other products, such as hand sanitizer, counter-cleaning wipes, or other industrial or surface cleaners. There is no evidence that the virus can spread to people from the skin, fur, or hair of animals. Talk to your veterinarian if you have questions about appropriate products for bathing or cleaning a therapy animal.
- Avoid taking the therapy animal to multiple LTC or other facilities.

Reference

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (Updated March 19, 2021). Guidance for Handlers of Service and Therapy Animals. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/animals/service-therapy-animals.html>.

Recommendations of the Long-Term Care Facility Subcommittee of the Utah Governor’s COVID-19 Community Task Force