

Transcript
Coronavirus Q & A – Episode 18
August 6, 2020



Alex Metricarti: Hello! I'm Alex Metricarti, Chief Marketing and Public Relations Officer for Living Branches. Today is Thursday, August 6, 2020. I am not here today with Ed Brubaker, Living Branches President/CEO. The questions we received this week are almost exclusively about the new released guidelines for visitation and other questions around the guidelines that were released this week, so you had specific questions and Ed and I decided that probably this is something he doesn't need to give you his philosophic take on those answers. I am going to answer some specific questions that families and residents have sent in with regard to the revised pandemic guidance that was released this week.

I'm going to start with Personal Care, Health Care, and Memory Care. To give you a little bit of background as to how our process works, the state has released various guidelines about what you can and cannot do as far as visitation, dining, activities – those types of things. So our directors of Personal Care and Health Care got together and worked out how we would be able to meet the state guidelines and be as least restrictive as we can possibly be for our residents. After about a month of going through and understanding exactly what the guidelines meant to us, we were able to release that guidance last week. It was an interesting process for me, from the standpoint of: I had not been in a lot of discussions before with the directors of those levels of care and I was really impressed, frankly, at how much concern they had for the wellbeing of our residents. I know that I've had communication from multiple family members over the last number of months saying: you don't understand, my mom is declining, my dad is not doing well, I know that they're vulnerable but I need to get in and see them, they're not doing well in this environment. And I heard the exact same thing – really – from our directors, who are so concerned about the effect and impact of isolation on our residents. And they are really wrestling with how do we balance keeping them as safe as we possibly can and doing the things that we know are so important for their wellbeing. So I was really privileged to be part of those discussion to understand just how much thought has gone into this.

The one area in the revised guidelines that we're really seeing an increase in what we're able to do is with regards to visitation. The new guidelines start August 10 at Souderton Mennonite Homes and at The Willows, and also for residents who live at Dock Woods in Health Care. In Oakwood Court and Harmony House, the revised guidelines go into effect on August 12. And this change in date for those two areas is based entirely on when they had their last round of COVID testing. You have to be so many days after that according to the state guidelines.

But when the campuses open up, what will be happening with visitation now is that we have the opportunity to have 45-minute visits instead of 20-minute visits and we can now have up to four adults and the children from that household visiting at that time. The caveat with the kids is that they do need to be able to follow department of health instructions which essentially means that if you tell them not to run around and not to hug their great-grandmother or great-grandfather, they need to be able to follow those instructions. But now we can have visits up to four adults

and kids in the household. And those visits do not need to take place at a chat box. The chat boxes are still there if you want to use them, that's fine. When you sign up on the website for your visit, you can indicate if you wish to use the chat box. But if you do not, you'll be sitting in chairs that are six feet apart so that social distancing can be maintained. We also will have gowns available that you as a visitor can wear. And if someone is wearing the gown, it will enable you to have short physical contact with your resident. We had a lot of conversation about this in our subgroup when the directors were discussing how to safely have visitation and there was a lot of concern about being able to allow physical contact, because it is so important. We do feel that if the person visiting is wearing a sterile gown, has just sanitized their hands, and of course is wearing a face mask throughout, that we do feel comfortable that hugging your loved one is something that can be done safely. So we're very excited for that because we know how much the residents are missing you.

Another change that is happening with visitation is that if there is inclement weather, we will now have the opportunity to have visits inside. This will be in a common area and not the resident's room at this time, but in a common area. We're pleased that we won't have to necessarily cancel if the weather is bad. One thing to note with these inside visits is there may be restrictions on the number of persons that can be in the room, because we have to still of course maintain the six-foot physical distancing in the room, so if you have a larger group and it needs to move inside, you might not be able to have everyone come to the visit. So just be aware of that.

The other thing that's different entirely with the visiting is that per the state, visitors are not required to sign in and sign out after their visit. So when you come to the screening station before your visit, you will see both the screening form that indicates if you've been around anyone who has been exposed to COVID, that type of thing, but then you'll also have a separate sign in sheet that you'll need to sign with your name, who you're coming to visit, what level of care, and then you'll sign out again when you leave. So a few changes with that, but all in all we're really pleased that we're able to double the amount of time that families are spending together.

A few things to note about what's happening in Personal Care, Health Care, and Memory Care: we are working our way back towards group dining. So we'll be having residents come back to the dining rooms. We will still of course be having physical distancing. In order to accomplish that, in some cases there may be two seatings for every meal in the dining room. In some cases they may be using other spaces for dining now. And there are a few cases where they are doing both of those things. But we're pleased that residents are going to be able to not have to dine in their rooms anymore and be coming out into a group setting. We'll also be adding back in more group activities, again everything properly physically distanced, which will include worship services at this time. We're working to start in-person worship services in each area which we know is something very important to residents.

Another question I've received from family members this week is: it's great that you're changing all of these guidelines, when will I be able to have my loved one come home for family dinner. That is something that there's still no provision for at this point. Right now we don't have any guidance from the state as to when that might be able to happen. We will continue to look for it, but as of right now, the reasons that residents may be leaving campus if they're living in Personal Care, Health Care, or Memory Care would be for medical visits. If there is anything else going on, you really need to speak with the director in your level of care to understand is provisions might be made.

I've also had a lot of questions this week from Residential Living residents asking about things that are changing for them. As we consider Residential Living, all along the restrictions have been a little bit looser there, because we don't have any state licensing bodies necessarily telling us what we need to do, so we've only been following the general pandemic guidelines released from the state of Pennsylvania. However, what will change a bit in Residential Living is that if your family member is coming to visit you through the screening station, which they should be doing, especially if you live in an apartment building – they will also need to sign in and sign out with that sign in sheet. We had previously said for those indoor visits too, that you're only having two family members. Now of course it can be up to four adults and the kids in that household. So lots more visits there. We are asking in Residential Living that we do not have family gatherings taking place on campus at this time. I've had a few questions about birthday parties or memorial services, things like that. And we are really trying to limit the number of persons that we have on campus so that we can reduce any potential spread. So we are asking that you not have family gatherings at this time on campus.

I had a lot of questions this week also about card playing and that kind of thing. We are not going to be starting back up group card night, group game night, that type of thing. If you want to have a card night with friends in your residence, of course you are very welcome to do that. Some good guidelines would be to of course please, please, please be sure to sanitize your hands very well, maybe even in-between games. Wear face masks. And if you are playing cards, sanitize the cards even. But yes, if you want to do that in your own residence of course that is up to you. We won't be having group activity nights like that anytime soon.

I also had a couple of very good conversations this week with residents who were looking for advice about the best way that they could be traveling safely with family members. And I want to be sure to let you know that we are here if you have questions. If you're trying to figure out what is the best way to this, or family is going to the shore, should I go with them? If I do, what should that look like? Please don't hesitate to call your director, your social worker, you can call me, talk to your executive director, whomever, to be a sounding board and give you directions. I talked to one person who's family was getting ready to take a trip to the mountains and we ended up talking it through and even though the persons who were coming were coming from states that are on Pennsylvania state quarantine list, which I think was causing her a little bit of anxiety, we determined that because they were going to be in separate houses, that if she was very intentional about making sure their interactions were outside and everyone was carefully

wearing face masks, that she would feel comfortable to make that trip. So if you have questions about those kinds of things of course we are here to help you.

Please do remember that the state quarantine list does exist. And that we at Living Branches are not allowing persons who are traveling from one of those quarantine states onto our campus. We've had a couple of calls from the screening stations about people who were coming up from Florida or Alabama or places like that. So please remember that when you're thinking about family visits.

I've also had questions about quarantining. We are not right now having a required quarantine for residents in Residential Living if they're coming back from vacation. The one thing I would say to this is Living Branches has always been a community where we look out for one another. So you know the activities that you have participated in, you know who you've been with, you know whether or not there has been a potential that you may have been exposed to the virus, and we would ask that if you think there's potential that you've been around someone from a state that has a higher infection rate or you've had unprotected contact or if you're just concerned that yes maybe I did have a higher risk of transmission, please out of the abundance of love and concern that I know you have for your neighbors, if you have a situation where you're just not sure, please stay away from people. I don't necessarily want to use the word quarantine in that situation. But if you're concerned, there's nothing wrong with saying, I'm going to be in my residence as much as possible because I don't want to take the risk of infecting someone else. Residents always look out for one another. That's one of the things I appreciate so much about being at Living Branches. And I think even now, even more in this situation, we want to be sure that that love and concern for each other is coming out in new ways, including not infecting each other, potentially.

I hope this is helpful. If you have more questions, please remember you can email them to coronavirusquestions@livingbranches.org. The coronavirus hotline is still in effect and is 215-565-2412. You can call the hotline to ask questions. You can talk to your social worker or director in your level of care. And of course there is information on the website. All of the revised pandemic guidance now at livingbranches.org/coronavirus. You can find it there as well as signup sheets for visitation. I hope this is helpful. Again thank you so much and have a great day!