

UPDATE CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)



Stay informed. Take precautions. Stay safe.

Dear Members,

In light of recent indicators of concern regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, EOEA has issued two updated guidances for assisted living residences. The first guidance, which is effective August 12, 2021, and replaces the guidance of June 14, 2021, addresses mask usage in a variety of settings, test guidance, and visitor participation in communal dining. The second guidance, effective immediately, replaces the May 2021 memorandum and extends the ability of Assisted Living Residences (ALRs) to request BinaxNOW Rapid Point of Care COVID-19 test kits until October 31, 2021. The full guidances are available to read [here \(Revised Guidance for Assisted Living Residences during-COVID\)](#), and [here \(Updated BinaxNOW Rapid Point of Care COVID-19 Testing for Assisted Living Residences\)](#), with updates to both written in red. Mass-ALA requested that access to free point-of-care tests that was set to end this month be extended, and we appreciate the state extending this access for ALRs with CLIA waivers through October.

Highlights of changes outlined in both documents are as follows:

- Pursuant to the DPH advisory issued on July 30, 2021 <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/covid-19-mask-requirements> it is recommended that all ALR residents wear a mask when outside of their units regardless of vaccination status
- All visitors should wear masks at all times while inside the ALR regardless of vaccination status
- As outlined in [COVID-19 Guidance for all healthcare organizations and providers issued on July 2, 2021](#), ALRs should establish a process to ensure everyone arriving at the ALR is assessed for symptoms of COVID-19 and exposure to others with suspected or confirmed SARS-CoV-2 infection.
- EOEA recommends that ALRs follow the latest Long term Care Surveillance Testing which can be found here: [DPH Guidance, August 4, 2021: Updates to Long-Term Care Surveillance Testing](#)
- EOEA recommends ALRs use BinaxNOW testing for the following purposes:
 - testing staff who are not fully vaccinated prior to beginning each shift. If staff are working two consecutive shifts, they only need to be tested prior to beginning the first shift; and,
 - testing staff who feel they are at increased risk of exposure.
 - ALRs are encouraged to offer rapid point of care (POC) testing to visitors using BinaxNOW tests if feasible. **However, an ALR cannot require POC testing as a condition of resident visitations.**
- As of August 3, 2021, DPH has made BinaxNOW test kits available for use to all Local Boards of Health (LBOH) to maximize testing availability. If an ALR is unable to provide POC testing, they may offer visitors to contact their LBOH.
- Residents and visitors must wear masks during indoor group activities, regardless of vaccination status.
- At this time, visitors are not permitted to dine in the indoor communal dining room.

- Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) and the Executive Office of Elder Affairs (EOEA) is making BinaxNOW test kits available for use at Assisted Living Residences (ALR) for the purpose of **testing staff who are not fully vaccinated prior to the beginning of each shift, staff who feel they are at increased risk of exposure, testing visitors,** and symptomatic staff and residents as well as close contacts, at no cost to the ALR. ALRs may request a prescribed number of BinaxNOW test kits from the Department of Public Health until **October 31st, 2021.**
- At this time, BinaxNOW test kits requested from DPH should be used for the following purposes:
 1. for individuals entering the facility who are not regularly reporting staff (e.g. visitors);
 2. testing symptomatic staff and residents at the ALR;
 3. testing asymptomatic staff and residents at the ALR as part of outbreak testing;
 4. testing direct care staff prior to beginning a shift on a unit they are not assigned.
 5. **testing staff who are not fully vaccinated prior to beginning each shift. If staff are working two consecutive shifts then they only need to be tested prior to beginning the first shift; testing staff who feel they are at increased risk of exposure; testing visitors.**
- **Testing staff who are not fully vaccinated prior to beginning to work a shift:** If a staff member is not fully vaccinated, meaning at least two weeks 2 weeks after their second dose in a 2-dose series, such as the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines, or 2 weeks after a single-dose vaccine, such as Johnson & Johnson's Janssen vaccine, the ALR should perform BinaxNOW testing on the individual prior to beginning to work a shift. If the staff member is working two consecutive shifts, then they only need to have BinaxNOW testing performed on them before beginning the first shift.
- **Testing for staff who feel they are at increased risk of exposure:** If a staff member feels they are at increased risk of exposure they may request that the facility perform BinaxNOW testing prior to beginning to work a shift, regardless of vaccination status.
- ALRs may only request BinaxNOW test kits from the Department of Public Health until **October 31st, 2021.**

Helpful reference documents related to these guidances can be accessed here.

- [Guidance for all healthcare organizations and providers issued on July 2, 2021](#)
- DPH Guidance, updated August 4, 2021: [Caring for Long-Term Care Residents during the COVID-19 Emergency](#)
- CDC Guidance for Assisted Living Facilities <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/assisted-living.html>

If you have any questions, please contact us at Mass-ALA@mass-ala.org

**The information provided in this COVID 19 update is solely for general informational purposes to assist in understanding the evolving guidance regarding the current COVID 19 public health threat. It is not intended to be a primary public health or medical resource but is provided as a clearinghouse for or compilation of various guidance issued by official and related sources.*