

Background

Many COVID-19 prevention and mitigation strategies are difficult to implement in the memory care setting. Consult with the HAI Program as needed.

Managing Memory Care Residents with Behavioral Techniques

- Use white boards, signs, reminders for *why* it is important to wear a mask
- Activities to reduce wandering, for example exercises in room or walking in hallway or outside
- Important to anticipate behaviors and plan proactively rather than responding reactively; disruption in routine sets the residents off
- Do not overmedicate residents
- Promote culture change of staff; various leaders within their own work community can be champions

Reasonable Exceptions for a Resident with Dementia to Not Wear a Face Covering

- Cannot physically put on or wear a face covering
- Wearing the face covering would cause them severe distress
- Someone with them needs to read their lips to communicate
- They need to remove the face covering temporarily to eat, drink, or take medication
- Medical exemptions

Individualized Attention During COVID-19

- Resident exhibiting anxiety and agitation will need gentle reassurance along with behavioral techniques – may require

individual assessment by trained psychologist

- Important to identify the triggers and time of day when undesirable behaviors occur
- Know the person: each person may need individualized interventions
 - Put yourself in the person's shoes
 - Try to understand their surroundings from their perspective
 - How would you feel?
- Contact family members who are supportive to explain to the resident the reason for mask wearing, if the resident refuses to wear their mask; a virtual visit or phone call, if visitation is not possible, could be arranged
- Contact their therapist or counselor for ideas to help the resident cope and accept mask wearing; a video conference or telephone call may also be helpful

Maintaining Spatial Distancing

Signage

- Use clear signage
- Consider markings on the floor in common spaces that indicate where they can sit or stand; or remove chairs from areas where residents are not permitted to sit
- Prevent residents from going into areas where they shouldn't be, e.g., traveling/movement between zones
- Block exits, e.g., with furniture, to deter wandering
- Use signage in different languages

Physical Distancing

- Model staying outside of an individual's "space"
- Sending non-verbal "messages"

Coping with Isolation

- Consider alternative ways to reduce feelings of isolation, e.g., music, art

Creative Solutions to Mask Wearing

- *Do they simply forget why it's needed?* Consider a sign by the door for when you go out. You may need to gently remind the person we're still in a pandemic.
- *Does the mask fit comfortably?* Try different styles or looser fastenings if it's too tight.
- *Are they unhappy with the feel of the fabric?* Try different materials, maybe one made from a familiar garment (check with them first before cutting the fabric).
- *Do they pull the mask down?* Try some distraction or positive reinforcement; describe how wearing a face covering helps to stop the spread of COVID-19 and keep people well.
- *Are they anxious it will stop them from breathing?* Offer reassurance and show them that it won't.
- *Is there a past experience that might make them fearful about wearing a mask (perhaps as a young child in the war)?* Talk to them about it and try to find ways to reassure them.
- *Are they lip readers?* Clear masks may be an option.
- *Is the mask unappealing?* Try using masks with themes that would appeal to individuals, such as a sports team, hobby, color, animals, flowers, etc.
- Masks distort the ability to recognize faces or facial expressions and more time may be required for the residents to understand what is being said or asked.

Managing Stress Among Staff

- Body language is important. Individuals with dementia pick up on depression and stress in staff.
- Facility infection preventionist should engage staff: What are you concerned about? What worries you? What do you know about the virus? What would you like to learn? In terms of hand hygiene, pose the question, "What do you think happens if we're not washing our hands properly?"
- Be patient and offer encouragement – if you show frustration or irritation, the person will pick up on this.

Additional Resources

- [Considerations for Wearing Masks](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/cloth-face-cover-guidance.html) (https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/cloth-face-cover-guidance.html)
- [Mental Health and Resiliency Tools for Health Care Workers: COVID-19](https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/hcp/mh.html) (https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/hcp/mh.html)
- [The Dice Approach](https://diceapproach.com/) (https://diceapproach.com/)
- [How to Select, Wear, and Clean Your Mask](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/about-face-coverings.html) (https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/about-face-coverings.html)