

# CMS Makes COVID-19 Nursing Homes Vaccination Data Available Online

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## CMS MAKES COVID-19 NURSING HOMES VACCINATION DATA AVAILABLE ONLINE

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### CMS Releases COVID-19 Vaccine Data to Public

In a recent update to their Care Compare tool, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services have released up-to-date COVID-19 vaccination data for nursing home residents and staff, allowing you to make more informed decisions about long-term care.

This update is the latest in a series of CMS guidelines for nursing homes during COVID-19, aimed at protecting seniors from the ongoing pandemic.

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### CMS issues nursing home vaccine mandate

Under the CMS Omnibus Health Care Staff Vaccination rule, staff at Medicare-certified nursing homes must be fully vaccinated by a state-specific implementation date, the latest of which is March 21, 2022. This means that two weeks must have passed after receiving a single dose vaccination or the second shot of a two-dose vaccination. Exemptions are available for staff members unable to vaccinate for medical reasons.

While primary vaccination data was previously available, the new update also includes data on booster doses of the vaccines. At the time of writing, booster doses are recommended by the CDC but not mandated for healthcare staff by CMS.



### Senior population remains vulnerable despite relaxed COVID-19 restrictions

Adults 65 and older remain one of the most vulnerable populations in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, which is why so much effort was put into protecting them during the early stages of the pandemic, including priority access to the COVID-19 vaccine for seniors, nursing home visitor restrictions, and expanded access to telehealth services.

However, while cases are falling, a growing portion of the population is vaccinated, and the CMS nursing home visitation guidelines have been relaxed, the risk remains. According to the New York Times, Americans above the age of 70 are far more likely to be hospitalized for COVID-19 than any other demographic.

Two years into the pandemic, a troubling pattern has begun to emerge: cases in the United States hit an all-time high on January 15, 2022, with a daily average of over 800,000 cases per day. During that time, approximately 30 out of every 100,000 Americans over the age of 70 were hospitalized for COVID-19 each day.

This echoes a similar, albeit more minor, spike in January of 2021. The culprit for both spikes was likely holiday travel, combined with winter conditions ideal for the spread of the virus. As the vaccine was not widely available in 2020, many people continued to adhere to social distancing and masking recommendations. The vaccination effort has dramatically reduced the severity of the virus for the vast majority of the population. Still, it comes with a false sense of security: while COVID-19 may pass unnoticed for the young, healthy, and vaccinated, it can be devastating to the medically vulnerable.

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### The importance of disease prevention

This is not a problem exclusive to COVID-19: even something as simple as the flu can prove lethal. Seniors account for 85% of flu-related deaths each year. That is why taking every available measure against disease is critical for seniors in nursing homes. By confirming the percentage of residents and staff who have their booster dose, you can rest assured that you or your loved one's risk of exposure is minimized.

If you or a loved one is at elevated risk for COVID-19 due to a pre-existing medical condition or inability to be vaccinated, be sure to take the following steps.

- Wear a mask during nursing home visits, particularly when indoors.
- Schedule activities outdoors, in well-ventilated areas.
- Wash your hands regularly.
- If you feel sick, reschedule your visit for a later date.

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