



July 17, 2020
COVID-19 Update
Essential Caregiver Visits

Dear Residents, Tenants, Families and Friends of St. John's,

As some of you may already know, on July 14 we did a whole house COVID-19 screening for residents that reside at the Woodlands and the Meadows at the Fountain Lake site. St. John's staff were also welcome to participate in the screening. Approximately 100 tests were performed and one person tested positive for the COVID-19 virus. The person that tested positive lives at the Meadows Assisted Living. The tenant does not have any symptoms and is doing fine. None of the employees that were screened tested positive for the COVID-19 virus.

Last Friday, July 10 the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) issued a press release for what they call Essential Caregiver Visits. Based on the press release, some people thought that nursing homes and assisted living facilities were opening their doors to all visitors. It would be great if we could do this, but with what we know about the COVID-19 virus and how it spreads, simply opening our doors at this time would put everyone that lives and works in a nursing home or assisted living setting at risk of being infected with this virus. The virus is still very active and is still spreading, so we want to be very thoughtful and careful when we open our doors.

Last Friday, the MDH also issued guidelines to nursing homes and assisted living facilities for implementing Essential Caregiver Visits. These guidelines require some time for us to process and implement. It was not something we could pull together in a day or two.

The St. John's Pandemic Committee met on Monday and Wednesday morning to review the guidelines and to begin planning for Essential Caregiver Visits. The MDH has very defined parameters or rules that nursing homes must follow in order to allow designated Essential Caregivers into the building. For example, the nursing home or assisted living facilities must establish policies and procedures for these visits. Nursing Homes and Assisted living facilities must also consult with the residents or tenants to determine who might best serve as an Essential Caregiver for that individual resident or tenant.

The St. John's Pandemic Committee has completed a lot of work related to the policies and procedures for Essential Caregiver visits. This work has not been finalized, but here are a few of the highlights that I can share at this time and that we will likely implement.

St. John's will allow Essential Caregiver Visits to meet the physical, emotional, spiritual, psychosocial needs and overall wellbeing of the residents or tenants.

In most circumstances the Essential Caregiver will likely be an immediate family member such as a spouse, son or daughter.

Every person that enters one of St. John's buildings could be a potential carrier of a virus. For this reason, only one person should be designated as an Essential Caregiver by the resident or tenant.

All Essential Caregivers will be required to go through training prior to starting essential visits. Training will be provided by St. John's staff. Training includes the use of personal protective equipment, proper infection control practices, and parameters related to the Essential Caregivers visit. The training and parameters are being implemented to help prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus within the St. John's Community.

Essential Caregiver Visits will need to be suspended if a resident, tenant, staff, or essential caregiver tests positive for the COVID-19 virus. Essential visits can resume when it is determined by St. John's and the MDH that it is safe to resume visits.

I will close with this...I grew up in a large family. I was close to my mom and dad when they were alive, and I still treasure the times when we just hung out together. I still have a close relationship with my three brothers and four sisters. My wife and I have a son and a daughter who are both married. We also have two grandchildren that we weren't able to see during the first few months of this pandemic. It has been very difficult for me to be separated from my family during this pandemic. From that perspective, I know how important it is for our residents and tenants to stay connected with family, and how difficult it is not to have regular contact with close family members. Talking on the phone is nice, but it's not the same as being together in person. The window visits and the outdoor visits were implemented for this reason and they do provide an opportunity for families to connect. I know that these visits have provided some much needed comfort and joy for the residents, tenants and their families.

With the implementation of the Essential Caregiver visits, in conjunction with the window visits and the outdoor visits, I am hopeful that the overall quality of life will be improved for St. John's residents, tenants and their families. I know that we can do this safely. We will all need to be on the same page. We will all need to take some very easy and basic precautions to protect residents, tenants, and each other from this virus, but it will all be well worth it.

Take Care and God Bless.

Sincerely,

Scot Spates
CEO / Administrator