

**Knox County Public Health**

**305 South 5<sup>th</sup> Street**

**Vincennes, Indiana 47591**

**June 10, 2020**

Dear families and friends of Knox County long term care residents,

Governor Holcomb recently gave guidelines for the resumption of face to face visitation of family and friends with residents of long term care facilities. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic we have recognized that residents of long term care facilities were the most vulnerable individuals in our population. At this moment approximately 40% of the deaths that have occurred due to COVID-19 have been to residents of long term care facilities.

There are several reason that this appears to have occurred. As individuals age their immune systems become less competent in its ability to fight disease. The individuals in long term care also often already have multisystem disease which leaves little reserve to fight the COVID-19 virus. Also the confined living conditions in a health care facility like a college dormitory or a cruise ship enable large numbers of the virus to spread to or inoculate an individual. For these reasons COVID-19 has had devastating and deadly results where it has “gotten in to” long term care facilities.

In Knox County we have been very fortunate to this point in time in that we have not had any deaths among the citizens of the county and no residents in the long term care facilities have tested positive for COVID-19. In the United States and in the state of Indiana we continue to see daily numbers of new cases and deaths due to COVID-19.

For the above reasons I feel that the continued safety of our long term care residents would be best served by waiting longer before we begin face to face visitation. I realize that there is a cost that we will pay as we balance the psychological, mental health and social wellbeing of the residents in our efforts to keep them free of COVID-19.

In a couple of more weeks the concentration of the COVID-19 virus in our county as well in the surrounding counties will hopefully be less. This will make face to face visitation safer to implement. This public health opinion is a recommendation to the facilities and is not a binding or mandatory regulation.

Thank you for your patience and understanding with regard to this matter,

Alan D. Stewart, M.D.

Knox County Indiana Health Officer