



Search



[Home](#) > [Research & Reports](#) > [Fact sheets](#) > [Safety in other occupancies](#) > [Nursing homes](#) > [Nursing home safety](#)

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Nursing home safety

Research & Reports

- > [Info on health care occupancies](#)
- > [NFPA Fire and Life Safety Inspection Manual](#)
- > [NFPA Fire Protection Handbook](#)
- > [Deadliest fires in facilities for older adults](#)
- > **[Nursing home safety](#)**

- [Messages for families](#)
- [Messages for nursing home staff](#)

Messages for families: Are your loved ones safe?

Having a loved one in a nursing home can be stressful and can often make people feel somewhat helpless. Worries can intensify when you hear of the tragic nursing home fire that occurred in Hartford, Connecticut. You can play a role to increase the safety of your loved one. Here are a few things to consider when either choosing or checking on someone already in a nursing home.

1. Is the building well maintained? Make sure that paper and other storage items do not block doors or hallways needed for escape.
2. Check to make sure there is an evacuation plan in place that involves all staff and is practiced regularly.
3. Are there safety systems in place such as alternative exits, smoke detectors, and sprinklers?
4. Check on the staff-to-patient ratio. How many staff per resident during the day and especially at night or on weekends and holidays? Is supervisory staff available to carryout an escape plan if there is a fire?
5. Are there guidelines for people who smoke such as a separate room or staff supervision?
6. Does nursing home management take your questions regarding safety seriously and are they forthcoming with information?

You have a right to get answers regarding the safety conditions that effect your loved one. Make sure you take the time to ask.

Messages for nursing home staff: Planning and practicing fire safety

Most people think the danger from fire is the flames, however, it is the smoke that can travel quickly to areas far from the fire. It is important to realize that people living in nursing homes may not be able to evacuate because of mobility or other disabilities. Proper planning, training, and practice of all staff are essential in order to provide for the safety of residents. It is important for staff to know that patient safety is their number one priority.

Adequate planning

- Every facility should have written fire procedures that are understood and practiced by all staff. Staff should be responsible for knowing and carrying out their part of the plan. That includes doctors, nursing staff, kitchen staff, maintenance, volunteers, and others.
- Response procedures should be practiced regularly

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- There should be a clear "code word" agreed upon beforehand for the facility to alert other staff in case of fire.

Quick response

- Call out the code to alert staff.
- Activate the fire alarm.
- Evacuate everyone in immediate danger.
- Close doors to contain smoke and fire.
- Once the fire is contained to the room of origin behind closed doors, never reopen the door or reenter the room to extinguish the fire.
- Close all doors to patient rooms.
- In evacuating, make sure no patient is left behind.

Source: *NFPA Public Education Division*

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[top of page](#)

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