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# Hampton Roads nursing homes begin easing restrictions on residents' socializing

By DAVE RESS  
DAILY PRESS | AUG 25, 2020





Lisa Kirby, Riverside's executive director of lifelong health nursing facilities, is photographed in a courtyard area near the Gardens at Warwick Forest on Tuesday, August 25, 2020, in Newport News. (Kaitlin McKeown/Virginia Media)

They call it the mousetrap game — one of the ways Riverside Health System staff have tried to deal with the isolation the COVID-19 control measures have forced on nursing home residents.

Now, as nursing home restrictions begin easing, Peninsula facilities are moving to let residents move around a bit more — some even have family visits out of doors, as Riverside now allows. It's a first step beyond efforts like the mousetrap game, which brought small numbers of residents, each in his or her doorway, to chase a remote-controlled toy mouse using a basket attached to a long pole.

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“We’ve been trying all kinds of ways to increase social interactions,” said Lisa Kirby, Riverside’s director of lifelong health facility operations and compliance.

That’s included setting up chairs in doorways so that they exercise together, while staying safely distant from one another.

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The idea is to keep virus controls from plunging residents into the kind of social isolation that can send vulnerable people into physical and mental decline.

Bayside of Poquoson moved earlier this month to allow the kind of window visits that other nursing homes had allowed since the spring, family members say.

An earlier email from its parent company’s chief clinical officer in response to one family member’s complaint about the earlier ban on window visits said there have been infections linked to such visits at other facilities.

Outbreaks in several Virginia nursing homes have sickened and killed dozens. Bayside has had no positive cases, though.

Generally, increased freedom of movement has come more slowly at nursing homes than in the rest of Virginia.

While the state has been under its Phase 3 guidelines, allowing restaurants, stores, barbershops and hair salons to operate as long as customers stay 6 feet apart and employees wear face masks, nursing homes haven't yet hit the stricter benchmarks they must reach to get to their own, separate Phase 3 status — the point at which visitors can come inside, if they've been screened for the virus and are wearing masks.

Phase 1 and Phase 2 homes, however, are allowed to arrange window visits and visits out-of-doors, as Riverside has done.

Some residents at St. Francis Nursing Center in Newport News have been allowed outdoors to enjoy the summer weather, said spokeswoman Emma Swann.

St. Francis Nursing Center also has hosted two drive-by parades for family members and residents over the past few months that provided residents the opportunity to see and speak with their relatives.

“We are ordering the equipment to allow for safe visiting with outside visitors,” said Mark Klyczek, president and chief executive of Virginia Health System, which operates seven facilities on the Peninsula, Middle Peninsula and Northern Neck.

He expects to have outside visiting in place in September, if the equipment arrives and testing results continue to show VHS's homes are keeping the virus out.

“We are investing in hiring additional people at each facility to facilitate the visits, and ensure a clean and safe environment for each visit,” he said.

able to go outside, said Alan Cosby, senior vice president at the facility's owner, Atlanta-based Trio Healthcare LLC.

He said the home has arranged video calls for family members and has been arranging activities that bring residents to their resident doors for social interaction, such as doorway Bingo.

“We are avoiding group activities in which social distancing cannot occur,” he added.

On the other hand, Virginia Health Services' homes restarted communal dining and activities this month.

“The residents are leaving their rooms more often and able to see and interact with their friends in a socially distant way,” said Klyzcek.

“So far the residents have really enjoyed being able to reconnect with their friends,” he added.

At St. Francis, common areas, such as the chapel, remain open for individual prayer and meditation sessions.

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Before nursing homes can ease restrictions on residents' group activities, outings, ability to leave for non-medically-necessary treatment and physical therapy, they have to have hit targets for testing, infection control and not have any new COVID-19 cases from exposure within the facility. They must also be reporting COVID-19 cases among residents and staff every week.

So far, those reports show a total of 177 confirmed cases of COVID-19 among the 1,600 occupied nursing home beds in the Peninsula, Middle Peninsula and Isle of Wight County, as of Aug. 9, the latest report posted by the U.S. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

That included a total of two new cases for that week.

A total of 69 staff members were positive for COVID-19.

*Dave Ress, 757-247-4535, dress@dailypress.com*

Dave Ress



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HEALTH & MEDICINE NEWS

# Keeping in touch: Hampton-Newport News Community Service Board adjusts to social distancing

By DAVE RESS  
DAILY PRESS | APR 10, 2020





Hampton-Newport News CSB staffer Bob Deisch and Freeman Washington chat about Washington's daily routine at his Hampton apartment on April 8, 2011. (Joe Fudge)

For the scores of people who came every day, the Hampton-Newport News Community Services Board's day treatment program was a vital part of coping with mental illness -- but it was also impossible to maintain with the state orders barring groups of more than 10 people.

So Anne Whitaker, the board's adult outpatient services director, scrambled to set up daily phone calls from her psycho-social services staff to program participants.

When she learned that a dozen participants didn't have phones, she went out and bought some to be sure she could stay in touch.

When one participant earlier this week reported running out of toilet paper, a staff member delivered some.

Whitaker is working on arranging remote video version of the group sessions that are such an important part of mental health therapy for many deeply distressed individuals.

The community mental health programs the board provides are a high-touch service -- but that's harder to do when people need to keep their distance. And so far, even as the board works to keep in close contact with the vulnerable people who rely on its staff, none of them, and none of its staff have contracted the virus.

The board is still very much open for business, said executive director Natale Ward Christian.

“We provide a life-saving service,” she said.

The staff members who respond to emergency calls, 24 hours a day, still do so, though crisis services director Ryan Dudley has been setting up video connections with police stations, jails and hospitals so he and his team can do remotely the assessments that determine whether an individual needs hospitalization.

The board's Crisis Stabilization Unit -- a place where people in crisis can stay for short periods while psychiatrists, nurses and therapists sort out the right mix of medication and support needed -- is putting one person at a time in its normally double-occupancy rooms. So far, that's been enough.

to communicate and need wheelchairs to move around, in the board's three intermediate care facilities still have in-house nurses to care for them. Staff at the board's 11 group homes for people with developmental disabilities are there every day -- after taking their temperatures to be sure they're not showing any symptoms of the virus. The board's residential program for pregnant women recovering from addiction is still admitting mothers-to-be.

Meanwhile, calls for help are up -- both on the hotline Dudley and his team monitor -- and for the same-day assessment services that Virginia's new STEP-VA initiative requires.

On the other hand, coronavirus worries don't seem to be generating additional anxiety or depression for some of the most distressed people the board serves -- the individuals who the board's assertive community treatment team visits at least once a day, said Bob Deisch, the board's adult care coordination director.

The team is handling some of those face-to-face contacts by phone, but for many, a team member still needs to stop by to make sure they are taking their medication, eating, and not spinning off into crisis.

When the team learned the boyfriend of one woman had the virus, they hurried her to a facility to get a test. driving her in a van to maintain the six foot separation the Centers for Disease Control suggests.

While waiting for test results -- they were negative -- the woman ran out of medications. A team member delivered them, setting them on the woman's doorstep and watching to make sure she picked them up.

There are some things the team has cut out. It will still take its clients to the supermarket or doctor's office, though they have to sit in the back of the van.

But for now, there are no more trips to the park or mall -- the kind of modest excursions that can help an extremely troubled person begin to reconnect with

“The quality of what we do is missing -- it isn’t the ideal,” Christian said.

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And she’s worried about longer term effects.

Cutbacks in services mean a cut in payments for services from the state. The board has had to furlough 50 employees and laid off 65 because a school based therapy program is shut down and won’t reopen, Christian said.

She wants to be sure all the board staff come back -- but in times of tight money, that’s not certain.

“Crisis shows you who people are and what they are capable of ... with our staff, we’re blessed,” she said.

*Dave Ress, 757-247-4535, dress@dailypress.com*

## Dave Ress



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# It started with a dinner party: How a William & Mary doctor became one of the first to get the coronavirus in Williamsburg

By DAVE RESS  
DAILY PRESS | MAR 25, 2020





David Dafashy, left, stands inside his home with his wife Mariangela Dafashy, right, his six-year-old daughter Elizabeth Dafashy, and Gaia Carollo, a foreign exchange student staying with the family, Tuesday evening March 24, 2020. David Dafashy and his wife were among the first people infected in the coronavirus in Williamsburg. (Jonathon Gruenke / Daily Press)

He was driving home from a small weekend gathering with some friends when David D. Dafashy, medical director at the College of William & Mary's student health center, got the call from the state health department.

He and his wife, the health official said, had been at a dinner party nearly two weeks earlier with someone who had later tested positive for the new coronavirus.

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Within days, the couple would be among the first to fall ill from COVID-19 in what's become Virginia's epicenter.

It came first as a bad headache and — oddly — as an inability to smell things.

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“I couldn't taste my wife's Sunday special pizza,” he said. “If I hadn't been aware of COVID-19, I probably would have thought I had a cold.”

But by pizza night — in fact, immediately after the health department's call — Dafashy, who had been helping the college's emergency management team respond to the virus ever since the first reports emerged from China, had already put himself and his family into quarantine, just to make sure they didn't spread the disease.

It made one key task, helping health officials trace others who might have been exposed to the still-somewhat mysterious virus, a bit easier — Dafashy hadn't been in contact with people after quarantining himself and his family. Health officials believe the highest risk of spreading the illness occurs around the time people start feeling ill — the theory is that that's when they're so full of virus that they're at the

contact-tracing.

“The idea is to think about prolonged contact — 20 or 30 minutes,” Dafashy said. “If you go to the gas station, hand over a credit card to someone 6 feet a way and leave a few seconds later, it’s probably OK.”

Still, Dafashy made a point of calling people he’d been in touch with before quarantining himself to let them know.

One reason: the path he thinks the virus followed to reach him is a reminder of why all the advice about social distancing, handwashing and staying home if you’re feeling ill really does matter.

It was some days after the dinner party, but before the health department call, that his wife mentioned she was feeling a bit off, and couldn’t taste food. Dafashy didn’t feel ill until several days after that — and after the call.

At some point, he figures, the virus slipped through gaps between hand-washing and eye-rubbing or face-touching to make first his wife and then him ill.

And he eventually got really ill.

“I’ve never had a flu where I felt so exhausted, so achy,” he said. The worst of it lasted for about nine days after pizza night, with severe headaches, fever, aches in his legs, arms and back. He was so tired that he slept for hours more than usual.

Family and friends came round to drop off food — leaving on the front step, for Dafashy to pick up an hour or so after they did so, to make sure the virus couldn’t get to them.

It helped, too, that his wife plans ahead — before that dinner party, as he was helping the college’s emergency management team figure out what they’d need to

He's feeling a lot better now, but he's still planning to stay home a few more days after the quarantine.

"It's just out of an abundance of caution, as we say at William & Mary," Dafashy said.

That caution — in part with Dafashy's input — has meant the college shifted to teaching online, while encouraging students to stay home and limiting access to campus buildings, including dorms and dining halls.

It's meant when he called people he'd been in contact with before his quarantine to let them know of his exposure, many of them are staying home even before getting test results, as he did when he got the health department call.

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Dafashy thinks the proactive effort of state and local health officials tracing contacts of people who test positive — as they did with him — is keeping what’s a fairly serious outbreak around Williamsburg from spiraling off out of control.

“If we all stayed home for three weeks, it’d dry up,” he said. “But that’s not practical .... I think Virginia has been taking the right approach” with directives to close schools, limit crowds and close the personal services business like barber shops and hair salons that put people into close contact.

All in all, those make up the kind of effort he hopes will eventually return the country back to a more normal daily life — something he’s very much looking forward to.

“Oh no,” he laughed, asked if the fateful dinner has strained relationships. “We’re dear friends, and when this is all over, we’ll have another dinner party.”

*Dave Ress, 757-247-4535, dress@dailypress.com*

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