

Rethinking Senior Spaces

Post-Pandemic

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What You'll Learn

Central to keeping residents safe in the midst of COVID-19 is social distancing. According to the CDC, limiting face-to-face contact with others is the best way to reduce the spread of the virus. But in senior living settings, restrictions to keep residents and visitors physically apart can also negatively impact seniors' mental health. While many communities have gotten creative about ways to keep residents connected during the pandemic, going forward, senior housing models that allow for more outdoor spaces to engage safely and conveniently may be what's next.

Learn what the future may look like in community housing.



Impacts of COVID-19 on Senior Living

Anyone can get COVID-19, but the risk of severe illness is highest among seniors and those with underlying health conditions. Since the virus spreads mainly among those who

are in close contact, a primary way residents can protect themselves is by limiting interactions with other people and taking precautions when they do engage. And one of the recommendations for seniors is to visit with friends and family outdoors when possible.

Severe illness means that the person with COVID-19 may require hospitalization, intensive care, or a ventilator to help them breathe, or they may even die. — CDC

Infection occurs when an infected person coughs, sneezes or talks, and respiratory droplets enter an individual's mouth, nose, or lungs. In closed spaces, there is less ventilation. That is why the risk of catching the virus is much lower outdoors than inside. Out in the open, coronavirus droplets disperse more quickly into the air. Often, outside environments allow for more space between people as well, further lowering the risk of transmission.

Indoor spaces with less ventilation where it might be harder to keep people apart are more risky than outdoor spaces. — CDC

While many communities got creative during the pandemic to keep seniors connected and engaged outside like offering outdoor wellness classes, going forward, the trend towards outside spaces may be seen in design as well.

Even outside, however, the same general guidance applies. While the risk is lower, it is not zero so residents should still be encouraged to:

- *Stay six feet apart*
- *Wear a mask*
- *Avoid large numbers of people*
- *Wash hands often*
- *Clean and disinfect*
- *Cover coughs and sneezes*





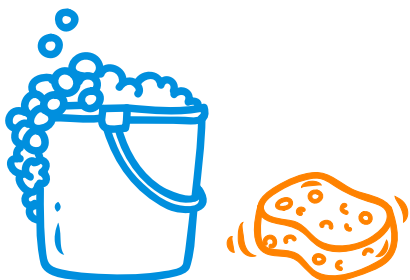
Adapting Models to Let the Outside In

Senior living designs were already changing pre-pandemic to appeal to more active seniors with longer life spans. But with the onset of COVID-19, there will likely be another shift in layouts to help keep residents safe from the current and any future outbreaks.

To limit the spread of germs by letting the outside in, here are some ways communities may transform to integrate outdoors spaces:

- **Courtyards:** Covered courtyards with adequate shelter from the elements can offer opportunities for smaller groups of residents to gather or take part in activities while allowing for safe social distancing.
- **Unit Access:** If residents have to shelter in place again, they may prioritize rooms with outdoor access that extend their living area and connect them with nature. That means private patios or small terraces for those on the first floor and balconies on upper levels that are large enough to accommodate seating and even tables.
- **Paths and Sidewalks:** Walking trails are important to encourage seniors to remain active. But these areas may need to be widened and configured for traffic patterns that limit interaction with others while allowing residents to safely travel on even surfaces rather than turf.
- **Gardens and Gazebos:** Inviting outdoor areas with shade offer residents beautiful places to sit outside to unwind or visit. However, benches or other seating should be spaced six feet apart and fixed to the ground.
- **Al Fresco Dining:** The creation of outdoor dining spaces like verandas allow residents to enjoy their meals in the open air while also allowing for adequate physical distancing. In lieu of permanent spots, communities may designate locations for visiting food trucks or barbeques.

Beyond opening up, other elements of design may be affected as well to incorporate things like:



Easy-to-clean surfaces and materials like copper, which has antimicrobial properties



Increased technology for keeping residents connected to loved ones as well as incorporating advances like touchless fixtures, automatic doors and voice controls



Smaller, self-contained communities within a larger building or even small homes or cottage-style residences





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