



Senior Living Communities in the Era of COVID

6 Questions to Ask When Choosing
a Mass Notification System



As one of the populations most vulnerable to COVID-19, senior living communities have the highest duty of care when it comes to taking precautions. While progress has been made in halting the spread, the threat of the [delta variant](#) makes it more important than ever for staff, residents and their families to remain vigilant.

Approximately [60 percent of staff](#) in U.S. nursing homes were vaccinated as of September 2021, and more than [80 percent of residents](#) in nursing homes have received the vaccine. In August 2021, [President Biden](#) announced that staff working in facilities serving recipients of Medicare and Medicaid will be required to get vaccinated.

As we continue to fight the pandemic battle, change will be a constant for senior living facilities. Keeping staff, residents and their families in the loop is certainly a challenge, but the right communications strategy makes all the difference. It's vital to ensure you have a system that's simple and efficient. Remember, your communications should reduce stress, not increase it. Fortunately, modern technology is here to help.

While it may be easy to assume seniors will oppose using technology, often that's not the case. In reality, more and more are embracing the convenience of the internet to keep in touch with loved ones, engage in the virtual world and

stay up to date on current events. Even for those who haven't logged on yet, learning to use a new method can help seniors maintain mental agility, which [studies have shown](#) has many benefits as we age. This is great news for managers of senior living communities. So, let's take a look at one modern means of communications which can help improve the quality of life and care in senior communities — mass notification systems (MNS).

The main capability of a mass notification system is to send alerts to a large group of people all at once. A reliable MNS uses multiple channels to ensure messages get through in real time, on a variety of devices. It can be used for daily business operations and in emergencies. Staff communications, event reminders and severe weather warnings are just a few examples.

But not every MNS delivers all the features your particular facility may need. When shopping for the right fit, here are six important questions to ask to make sure you make a wise choice.

ONE

Versatility: Can the system be used for multiple purposes?

An MNS that can multi-task not only saves money, but makes the most of your time. Using it for a variety of purposes means your staff will become familiar with the system quickly, making them more efficient in times of emergency. It also means you can streamline areas such as meal planning reminders for residents, COVID procedural alerts to families and scheduling updates for staff. And since you'll be using it for a variety of alerts, make sure the MNS you select has a price plan that includes unlimited messaging, rather than charging for each text.



TWO

Functionality: Will it work in a crisis?

Unless the answer is a resounding “Yes,” you’ve got the wrong system. It’s important to feel confident that even if power goes out or phone lines are down, you can still reach everyone. This is especially important because a COVID outbreak could very well overlap with another emergency, such as severe weather or a fire in the building. With a fully redundant MNS, you gain peace of mind in knowing you have multiple channels to reach everyone. With two-way communications, residents have a reliable means of asking for help or marking themselves safe. This, in turn, helps families feel more secure about their loved ones’ safety in your facility.

THREE

Adding Contacts: How will you get everyone into the system?

With the right MNS, this should be easy. It’s important to verify compatibility with your current directory. Another vital feature is the ability for recipients to self-update their contact information and receive reminders to do so. You should never have to spend time manually entering this information. The pandemic has added many complications to running a senior living community — your MNS should keep things as simple as possible and reduce the tedium of outdated data entry processes.

FOUR

Ease of Use: Will your teams get it?

Free trials are a great way to let your team get acclimated with the user interface. Send alerts to test groups of residents, staff and family members who are motivated to help improve everyone’s

experience. Try a few test drills that include changes to COVID procedures (such as who is allowed to visit and what protocols they need to follow) to make sure your teams are properly trained and familiar with the system.

FIVE

Modalities: How will your alerts be sent and received?

Do you plan to record your alerts through voice-to-text or type them out? Can you designate whether a recipient prefers voice alerts, text, email or push notifications? Can you opt for the alerts to go to multiple devices? Do a portion of your residents speak a native language other than English? It's important that the MNS you select meets all of your specifications. This gives the greatest likelihood recipients will see and pay attention to your alerts. Giving residents customizable options also helps them feel assured they will stay well informed, both during fraught COVID emergencies and on a day-to-day basis.

SIX

Reporting: Can you review a record of past communications?

An audit trail is important both for legal compliance and to improve your communications process. Find out if the MNS you're considering provides detailed reports, including who received your alerts, the time they were opened and the actions taken in response. This is especially important during the pandemic, when both legal and medical requirements are frequently changing, necessitating detailed record keeping. To this end, it's important to see which phone numbers and email addresses are out-of-date, so updates can be made regularly. Ask for a sample report to see how much detail is provided in these areas.



Throughout this process don't forget general best practices for communications during COVID. That means keeping everyone informed and safe as protocols and alert levels change in your community, as well as maintaining a solid communications channel with suppliers to ensure you're ready for lockdowns. By taking steps, you have the best chance of continuing to provide stable living accommodations for the people who need it most.



Learn more about how **One Call Now** can help keep your residents safe, informed and involved in their community.

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