

# LONG TERM CARE COMMUNITY COALITION

*Advancing Quality, Dignity & Justice*

*Issue Brief*

## **Animal Care Standards vs. Nursing Home Resident Experiences: Safe Food Handling**

The quality and safety of nursing homes are longstanding public concerns. Numerous studies over the years have identified widespread and significant deficiencies in care, including serious abuse and neglect. It is such cases of degrading and inhumane conditions that led us to question the extent to which the experiences of residents in nursing homes actually fall below the standards and expectations for treatment of animals in zoos and other settings.

This is one issue in a series of briefs that provide the results of our assessment of the extent to which conditions in nursing homes fail to meet the standards of care for animals. Each brief focuses on an issue which we have identified as important. These briefs, and the [full report](https://nursinghome411.org/ltccc-report-animal-care-vs-nursing-home-care) on our assessment, are available at <https://nursinghome411.org/ltccc-report-animal-care-vs-nursing-home-care>.

The point of this work is not to trivialize the experiences of either nursing home residents or animals but, rather, to illustrate how systemic failures to hold nursing homes accountable for abuse and neglect too often subject residents to conditions that not only fall below the federal nursing home standards of care, but also below accepted standards for the humane treatment of animals.

### **ANIMAL CARE STANDARD VS. NURSING HOME RESIDENT EXPERIENCE**



Food should be stored in facilities which adequately protect against “spoilage or deterioration and infestation or contamination by vermin,” and should be “stored in containers with tightly fitting lids or covers or in the original containers as received from the commercial sources of supply. . . .”

*-[Animal Welfare Act, USDA](#)*



Cockroach infestations, moldy ice machines, and mouse droppings were among the many food handling incidents detailed in a recent report on food safety violations in nursing homes. Such violations pose serious health risks, as demonstrated by the norovirus outbreak that sickened 29 residents and 32 staff members at a for-profit Wisconsin facility.

*-[FairWarning](#)*

## STANDARDS FOR NURSING HOME CARE

Federal regulations require that nursing homes obtain food from government-approved sources and that they “[s]tore, prepare, distribute and serve food in accordance with professional standards for food service safety.” For information on requirements for a safe and clean environment, as well as other important standards, see LTCCC’s Primer at <https://nursinghome411.org/ltdcc-primer-nursing-home-quality-standards/>.

## RELEVANT NURSING HOME STATISTICS

- **Food storage.** A [2018 CMS survey](#) found that food storage was the second-most cited deficiency in nursing homes.
- **Virus outbreaks.** Nursing home residents are highly vulnerable to viral infections, particularly those involving the norovirus. [A study examining norovirus outbreaks from 2009 to 2012, published by the CDC](#) found that “most (80%) nonfoodborne outbreaks occurred in long-term care facilities such as nursing homes.”

“Across the country, [230 foodborne outbreaks](#) were reported from 1998 to 2017 in long-term care settings. . . . The outbreaks resulted in 54 deaths and 532 hospitalizations, and sickened 7,648 people—figures experts say are almost certainly an undercount.”

- FairWarning

## NEWS AND REPORTS

### Of mice and mold

A 2019 [report by FairWarning](#) detailed the often unreported poor conditions surrounding nursing home food safety, with issues such as cockroach infestations, moldy ice machines, and mouse droppings plaguing facilities. The report, citing a December 2018 Statement of Deficiencies, noted that 29 residents and 32 staff members at a for-profit Wisconsin facility (then-rated two stars) were sickened in a norovirus outbreak. The SoD stated that kitchen staff had failed to monitor and control sanitizer levels in the dishwasher.

### ‘Dried brown food debris’

[Accordius Health at Harrisonburg](#) (VA) was cited for [failing to safely store and prepare food](#). Its freezer was not sealed properly, and ice formed on the food stored near the freezer door. The dietary manager told the surveyor that they were “having a lot of maintenance issues with [their] freezer.” The surveyor found many of the food products covered with ice due to the malfunctioning freezer. The surveyor also found a can opener covered in “dried brown food debris,” which the dietary manager said had not been washed in a while.