

June 23, 2023

MEMORANDUM TO: Long-Term Care Licensees

FROM: Jeff Butler, Assistant Deputy Minister
Ministry of Long-Term Care Operations Division

SUBJECT: COVID-19 Response Measures Update

Thank you for your continued commitment to ensuring the health and safety of residents and staff in long-term care (LTC) homes.

The Ministry of Long-Term Care (MLTC) continues to work closely with the Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health (OCMOH) to monitor the status of the pandemic and is now taking the next step in the phased approach to embedding COVID-19 response measures into routine operations, including changes to masking, IPAC audit frequency and isolation requirements.

The changes listed below are expected to be implemented by June 30, 2023. However, homes that may be prepared to make these changes in advance of this date are welcome to implement changes as early as June 26, 2023. LTC homes should anticipate that some pandemic response measures may be reinstated if the province enters a high-risk period of respiratory virus transmission, such as during the fall respiratory virus season.

Masking requirements

For staff, students, volunteers, and support workers:

- Masking will be based on a point-of-care risk assessment (PCRA), consistent with existing Routine Practices, and on the return-to-work protocol following COVID-19 infection (see section below on staff isolation)
 - A PCRA must be completed by every health care worker before every patient interaction and task to determine whether there is a risk to the health care worker or other individuals of being exposed to an infectious agent, including COVID-19, and determine the appropriate IPAC measures to be taken.
- Staff may consider wearing a mask during prolonged direct resident care (defined as one-on-one care within two metres of an individual for 15 minutes or longer).
- Masks are no longer required in administrative and staff-only areas (e.g., lunchrooms, offices, gyms).
- Homes are encouraged to implement “mask friendly” policies, including accommodating:

- staff who prefer to continue to wear a mask beyond minimum requirements, and
- residents (or substitute decision-makers) who request that a staff member wear a mask when providing care, in alignment with the Residents' Bill of Rights.

For caregivers and visitors:

- Masks are recommended, but not required, in all areas of the home.
- This means that caregivers and visitors may now join in for dining and sharing a meal or beverage in communal areas.

In outbreak situations, or if a resident is on [Additional Precautions](#), all individuals are required to comply with masking and other personal protective equipment requirements as directed by the outbreak management team and the local public health unit.

IPAC Audits

- IPAC audits must be performed at least quarterly when not in outbreak, in alignment with the [Infection Prevention and Control Standard](#).

Changes to Ministry of Health Guidance for COVID-19 cases (effective June 26, 2023)

- **Staff** with COVID-19 may now routinely return to work once they no longer have a fever and their symptoms have been improving for 24 hours (48 hours if gastrointestinal symptoms). Upon return to work, they should follow measures to reduce the risk of transmission for 10 days from their symptom onset/positive test, including wearing a mask and distancing from others before they remove their mask (e.g., to eat or drink).
- **Residents** with COVID-19 remain under isolation and under additional precautions for 10 days.
 - If they are able to independently and consistently wear a mask, they may leave their room to participate in activities and join others in communal areas provided they meet the following criteria:
 - It has been a minimum of 5 days from symptom onset or positive test;
 - They are asymptomatic or their symptoms have been improving for 24 hours (48 hours if gastrointestinal symptoms) and no fever is present;
 - They wear a mask at all times outside of their room, they do not join in communal dining (since they cannot remove their mask around others) and they continue to follow additional precautions for 10 days after their symptom onset or positive test.
 - If a resident is unable to mask, the resident must remain in isolation for 10 days following symptom onset (or positive test) and until symptoms have been improving for 24 hours (48 hours if gastrointestinal symptoms), except to leave for a walk in the immediate area with a staff person wearing a mask to support overall physical and mental well-being.
 - Roommate close contacts should be placed on Additional Precautions. Individuals who remain asymptomatic may discontinue isolation after a minimum of 5 days (based on 5 days from when the case became symptomatic or tested positive).

- **Visitors** should continue to avoid visiting a long-term care home for 10 days after symptom onset or positive test result. Clarification has been added that a visitor who is essential to the resident's overall health and well-being (e.g., a caregiver) is able to visit within the 10-day timeframe if asymptomatic or symptoms have resolved, but must follow measures to reduce the risk of transmission for 10 days from their symptom onset/positive test, including wearing a mask.

To support the changes outlined above, please find enclosed the following updated material, effective June 26, 2023:

- COVID-19 guidance document for long-term care homes in Ontario
- What Residents Can Expect
- Frequently Asked Questions
- [COVID-19 Guidance: Long-Term Care Homes, Retirement Homes, and Other Congregate Living Settings for Public Health Units](#)
- [Infectious Disease Protocol Appendix 1: Case Definitions and Disease Specific Information Disease: Diseases caused by a novel coronavirus](#)

In addition, the MLTC will be holding webinars over the next two weeks for LTC home operators as well as for residents, families, and caregivers. Webinar details and links will be shared on LTChomes.net.

Access to PPE and testing supplies

As a reminder, homes can continue to access PPE and testing supplies from the [PPE Supply Portal](#). Homes are now able and encouraged to use the PPE Supply Portal to place regular orders for PPE beyond emergency supply requests. Supplies available to homes include N95s, medical masks, gloves, gowns, hand sanitizer, etc. PPE supplies ordered through the PPE Supply Portal remain free of charge to LTC homes.

LTC homes will continue to have access to rapid antigen tests, free of charge, until December 31st, 2023. These can continue to be ordered through the [PPE Supply Portal](#).

If you have any questions about the PPE Supply Portal, including how to register for an account, please email SCO.Supplies@ontario.ca

COVID-19 vaccination

Getting vaccinated and staying up to date with your COVID-19 vaccines is the best way to remain protected from the most serious effects of COVID-19 infection. Individuals at increased risk of severe illness due to COVID-19 infection, including LTC home residents, were recommended to receive a bivalent booster this Spring, **provided 6 months have passed** since their last vaccine dose or confirmed COVID-19 infection.

It is anticipated that a Fall booster might also be recommended for long-term care residents, ahead of the Fall respiratory illness season. Further information will be provided once public health recommendations about a Fall booster are received. As a reminder, homes must offer residents immunization against influenza and COVID-19, per recent changes to O. Reg. 246/22 s.102, ss12.2. Homes are also strongly encouraged to administer COVID-19 and Influenza vaccines independently to ensure residents, staff and essential caregivers have access. Co-administration of the COVID-19 vaccine and the

influenza vaccine is safe and encouraged where possible (the influenza vaccine may be given simultaneously, the same day, or at any time before or after the COVID-19 vaccine).

COVID-19 therapeutics

As a reminder, where possible, long-term care primary care providers are encouraged to prioritize assessments for residents who may be eligible for antivirals, given the timing constraints on administering treatment (e.g., Paxlovid is to be given within 5 days of onset of symptoms). This includes **pre-assessing residents for eligibility for antivirals in advance of a positive COVID-19 test or symptoms**. It is recommended that LTC homes' primary pharmacy provider maintain a supply of Paxlovid in stock to ensure the drug can be dispensed promptly. For further information on COVID-19 therapeutics, please refer to the [COVID-19 Guidance: Long-Term Care Homes, Retirement Homes, and Other Congregate Living Settings for Public Health Units](#).

Thank you again for your ongoing efforts, which have been critical for keeping residents safe while ensuring high quality of care within LTC homes.

If you have questions, please contact MLTCPandemicResponse@ontario.ca.

Sincerely,



Jeff Butler
Assistant Deputy Minister
Long-Term Care Operations Division

Attachments:

COVID-19 Guidance Document for long-term care homes in Ontario
Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)
'What Residents Can Expect' Handout

c: Melissa Thomson, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Long-Term Care (MLTC)
Dr. Catherine Zahn, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Health (MOH)
Dr. Barbara Yaffe, Associate Chief Medical Officer of Health, MOH
Alison Blair, Associate Deputy Minister, Health Integration and Partnerships, MOH
Michael Hillmer, Assistant Deputy Minister, Digital and Analytics Strategy, MOH
Matthew Anderson, President and CEO, Ontario Health
Lisa Levin, Chief Executive Officer, AdvantAge Ontario
Donna Duncan, Chief Executive Officer, Ontario Long Term Care Association
Lindsay Jones, Association of Municipalities of Ontario
Michael Jacek, Association of Municipalities of Ontario
Michael Sherar, President and CEO, Public Health Ontario
Cynthia Martineau, CEO, Home and Community Care Support Services
Dr. Rhonda Collins, President, Ontario Long Term Care Clinicians
Samantha Peck, Executive Director, Family Councils Ontario
Dee Tripp, Executive Director, Ontario Association of Residents' Councils