

Key Messages to Support Residents and Families in LTC Homes

March 9, 2022

- Trends in key public health and health care indicators continue to improve each week. For example, outbreaks, hospitalizations, and intensive care unit admissions have been declining.
- With the Omicron wave receding, steps are being taken to re-open Ontario, including easing measures in long-term care homes.
- The Ministry of Long-Term Care has been working closely with the Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health on a risk-based approach in long-term care that balances measures that are still needed to reduce COVID-19 risk with the importance of overall resident health, wellbeing and quality of life.
- As of March 14th, to support this balance and reflect where we are in the pandemic:
 - All general visitors, including children under the age of 5, can visit homes. Visitors (including caregivers), with the exception of children under the age of 5, need to follow the vaccination policy of the individual long-term care home.
 - Outdoor visits can be any size, space permitting.
 - There can be up to 4 general visitors and/or caregivers visiting a resident at one time.
 - All residents can go on social overnight absences.
 - Social activities can be among different groups of residents. Cohorting is required for dining only.
 - Social group activities can be larger in size while crowding should be avoided and masking continued, including for residents where tolerated.
- Also as of March 14th, the provincial directive requiring homes to have a consistent vaccination policy will be revoked. This is about continuing to move towards a steady state and means each home is responsible for its own vaccination policy.

- For greater clarity, revoking the provincial directive does not impact on the ability of homes to retain their employer-led vaccination policies provided they follow applicable laws, such as the *Human Rights Code* and the *Long-Term Care Homes Act*, including the Residents' Bill of Rights.
- Vaccination remains a key defense against COVID-19 and all Ontarians who are eligible are encouraged to get vaccinated, including receiving a booster dose.
- Everyone is reminded of the importance of remaining vigilant with public health measures, such as screening and testing, masking and using appropriate personal protective equipment.
- The ministry continues to work with the Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health to monitor trends and will respond as needed if for example, a new variant emerges.

Questions and Answers

Q: Why is the ministry moving away from mandatory vaccination for all long-term care homes and allowing homes to implement their own/different vaccination policies?

A: The provincial directive was needed earlier in the pandemic to consistently support all homes to put a vaccination policy in place. The provincial directive specified the elements that must be in each policy at a minimum and those specifics changed over time. Most recently the provincial directive was updated to include a third dose requirement for staff, students, volunteers, support workers and caregivers. All homes now have a vaccination policy in place, and at this point in the pandemic we are able to shift from a provincial directive that requires homes to have a mandatory vaccination policy to a guidance-based approach that continues to support homes with their employer-led policies and best practices.

While the provincial directive is revoked effective March 14, 2022, long-term care homes can keep their vaccination policies in place, with any changes they have determined to be appropriate. For example, homes may not retain a third dose requirement if, for example, they are concerned about staffing. Home policies can continue to have requirements for staff, volunteers, support workers, student placements, caregivers, general visitors, or other people entering a long-term care home. These requirements must be consistent with the Long-Term Care Homes Act, 2007, including the Residents' Bill of Rights, and comply with all applicable laws, such as the Human Rights Code.

Q: Could staff that were previously put on leave or terminated due to not getting vaccinated return to work?

A: Long-term care homes, as employers, can keep their vaccination policies in place. They retain their ability to mandate vaccination requirements. Home policies can continue to have requirements for staff, volunteers, support workers, student placements, caregivers, general visitors, or other people entering a long-term care home. These requirements must be consistent with the Long-Term Care Homes Act, 2007, including the Residents' Bill of Rights, and comply with all applicable laws, such as the Human Rights Code. Homes need to communicate how their vaccination policy is continuing beyond the life of the provincial directive.

Q: What if I am not comfortable with an unvaccinated staff member providing me care?

A: Regardless of vaccination status, all staff are actively screened when they enter a long-term care home and must be tested regularly for COVID-19. Staff must also wear appropriate personal protective equipment when providing care to residents. We encourage you to speak to your home if you have concerns about the care you are receiving.

Q: Are masks still required?

A: All staff and visitors must wear a medical mask for the entire duration of their shift or visit (including in the residents' room). Additionally, a medical or non-medical mask is required for the entire duration of an outdoor visit for general visitors. Removal of masks for the purposes of eating should be restricted to only areas designated by the home.

Residents are encouraged by their home to wear, or be assisted to wear, a medical mask or non-medical mask when receiving direct care from staff, when in common areas with other residents (with the exception of meal times), and when receiving a visitor, as tolerated.

Q: Who can visit a resident in a long-term care home?

A: As of March 14, 2022, all persons can visit a long-term care home as long as they follow the home's vaccination policy. Children under the age of 5 can also visit homes although they are not eligible to receive a COVID-19 vaccine.

Q: Can general visitors and essential caregivers join residents for a meal and for social gatherings (both for communal dining or in the resident's room)?

A: Caregivers and general visitors may accompany a resident for meals to assist a resident with eating, however, they need to always keep their mask on and are not able to eat with the resident. Caregivers and general visitors do not need to physically distance themselves from residents they are visiting and may join group activities with residents as space permits.

Q: Will any vaccination requirements remain in place for residents who go on social absences?

A: As of March 14, 2022, all residents, regardless of their vaccination status, can enjoy social absences of any duration, including overnight absences.

Q: Who can I contact if I have any issues or questions?

A: If you have questions about the Ministry's direction or requirements, please contact MLTCpandemicresponse@ontario.ca. If you have questions about a specific home's vaccination policy, please contact the individual home.