

**Ministry of Long-Term Care**

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Long-Term Care Operations

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**Ministère des Soins de longue durée**

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November 17, 2022

**MEMORANDUM TO:** Long-Term Care Licensees

**FROM:** Jeff Butler  
Assistant Deputy Minister  
Long-Term Care Operations Division

**SUBJECT:** Long-Term Care Preparedness for a Challenging  
Respiratory Season

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With the arrival of colder weather, it is as important as ever to be prepared for this respiratory illness season, which has already begun and is expected to be challenging due to the high levels of COVID-19 circulating and a resurgence of influenza and other respiratory viruses. Influenza is on the rise across the province and is anticipated to increase rapidly over the coming weeks. Residents of LTCHs are at increased risk of severe outcomes from respiratory viruses, including COVID-19 and influenza. Rigorous adherence to infection prevention and control (IPAC) measures, as well as high uptake of vaccinations and ready access to therapeutics will be key to preventing severe illness amongst residents and ensuring a healthy workforce is available to provide care to residents. We are providing some information to support ongoing preparedness for the respiratory illness season in the long-term care sector.

**COVID-19 and Influenza Vaccines**

Vaccination is the most effective way to protect against the most serious effects of COVID-19 and influenza. Given the challenging respiratory illness season that is upon us and the higher risk of severe illness these viruses can cause in the long-term care resident population, it is **strongly recommended** that long-term care residents and staff receive:

- **the bivalent COVID-19 booster as soon as they are eligible** after the minimum **three-month interval** since their last COVID-19 vaccine dose or COVID-19 infection.

- **influenza vaccine as soon as possible**, and ideally before mid-November 2022, given the current projections on influenza in the community, and the two weeks it takes for an individual to develop an immune response from the vaccine.

To support staff and caregivers in keeping up to date with their vaccines and to continue to protect the high-risk residents that they care for, the Ministry is strongly encouraging homes to include staff and caregivers when planning vaccine clinics for residents whether the home is independently administering the vaccines or working with a partner to administer the vaccines (public health, GoVaxx mobile clinic, etc.).

With respect to COVID-19 vaccines, both the Moderna and Pfizer bivalent boosters have been approved by Health Canada and offer much better protection against the Omicron variants than the original COVID-19 vaccines. Homes should administer the bivalent vaccine brand that is first available to them.

As of November 15, 2022, 63% of eligible residents have received a COVID-19 fall booster, and 287 homes have successfully vaccinated over 75% of their eligible residents. We urge all homes to offer the bivalent booster to eligible residents and to strongly encourage staff and caregivers to get their bivalent booster as soon as possible.

With respect to influenza vaccines, 590 homes have now received their vaccine supply and have begun planning for and administering these vaccines to residents and staff. As a reminder, co-administration of the COVID-19 bivalent booster and flu vaccine is safe and encouraged where possible (the flu vaccine may be given simultaneously, the same day, before or after the COVID-19 vaccine). It is not recommended to wait two weeks between administration of these vaccines.

Uptake of both the COVID-19 bivalent booster and influenza vaccine is crucial to protecting the health, safety and well-being of residents and staff during what will be a challenging respiratory illness season.

Attached are resources about the COVID-19 bivalent booster for long-term care homes, including updated Q&As which homes may re-share with residents, caregivers and their families, along with an updated consent form (the prior one is still valid if it has previously been signed).

### **COVID-19 and Influenza Antivirals**

[Paxlovid](#) is an oral antiviral medication available for individuals infected with COVID-19 who are at a higher risk of progressing to severe disease requiring hospitalization. When taken early in the course of COVID-19 infection, antivirals can limit the severity of illness and decrease the risk of hospitalization. To prescribe Paxlovid, a positive COVID-19 test (PCR or RAT) is required. If a resident is presenting with symptoms but has a negative rapid antigen test, a PCR test is recommended as soon as possible to meet the five-day treatment window.

A physician or nurse practitioner must determine if treatment is right for a resident based on clinical judgement, the goals of care, and the potential for drug interactions. Homes are encouraged to pre-emptively:

- Determine if a resident meets eligibility, including reviewing medications for potential drug interactions and ordering a serum creatinine while the residents are well.
- Connect with their contracted pharmacy about including Paxlovid in their emergency box, especially if a home is in a remote area.

A patient handout translated into [multiple languages](#) is available as a resource to share with residents and their caregivers and families. Attached, for your reference, is a clinician memo from Ontario Health (OH) issued on August 30<sup>th</sup>, 2022 to share with prescribing clinicians in your home.

All long-term care contracted pharmacies have access to Paxlovid and, in emergency situations, homes may rely on their secondary pharmacy to access Paxlovid. Attached is a Q&A on the supply of Paxlovid to residents of LTC homes, clarifying pharmacy reimbursement. If you encounter issues with accessing Paxlovid for your residents, please connect with us at [MLTCpandemicresponse@ontario.ca](mailto:MLTCpandemicresponse@ontario.ca).

If a patient is not eligible for Paxlovid, there may be other therapeutic treatment options (i.e., Remdesivir). Residents and their caregivers are encouraged to proactively speak with their primary healthcare provider or work with their OH regional contact to access Remdesivir through local pathways. (Note: OH regional contacts are listed below under the “Support for Homes with Fall Preparedness” section).

**Tamiflu and Relenza** are influenza antiviral medications that decrease the duration of influenza symptoms and can help to prevent the complications of influenza, such as hospitalization and potentially death. All long-term care homes should ensure they have **ready access to Tamiflu (or Relenza)** as treatment for residents with influenza-like illness, and to **Tamiflu** for prevention (prophylaxis of residents and unvaccinated staff who are not ill and are located within the outbreak area) in the event of an influenza outbreak in order to reduce the likelihood of severe illness amongst residents.

### **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and Testing Supplies, and new PPE Supply Portal**

Ensuring sufficient testing and PPE supplies is a critical component of fall preparedness. Homes should ensure sufficient testing supplies on hand to meet asymptomatic testing requirements as well as testing that may be required in a respiratory outbreak. This includes supplies to test for influenza in a timely way to maximize the benefit of antivirals such as Tamiflu, which should be provided within 48 hours of symptom onset.

We are pleased to announce that a new ordering process for PPE and COVID-19 testing supplies has now launched, called the PPE Supply Portal. The PPE Supply Portal is a simple, online self-serve ordering tool that can be accessed 24/7. The tool

features convenient, efficient, and simple ordering through an account that will keep organization information and order history.

All long-term care homes have been pre-registered for the portal. Pre-registered users have received an email stating that an online account has been created for them. Follow the link provided in the email to reset the home's password and activate the account. Each home's Director of Care has been set as the primary user of the account and will be able to add or edit other users. If for some reason a home did not receive an email, please connect with [SCO.Supplies@ontario.ca](mailto:SCO.Supplies@ontario.ca).

With the launch of the new portal, the ministry will end the auto-shipments of Rapid Antigen Tests, and homes may resume ordering testing supplies as needed through the new portal. **The last auto-shipment of rapid antigen tests will be shipped out the week of November 14, 2022.**

All long-term care homes must activate their account and **start using the portal for ordering PPE and COVID-19 testing supplies no later than December 1, 2022.** Homes will receive an email once their account is activated.

As a reminder, homes can access COVID-19 testing supplies free of charge from the PPE Supply Portal at any time. For PPE, homes are expected to use their own supply channels, but have access to the provincial PPE stockpile in emergency situations. However, to avoid circumstances where homes' supplies reach critical levels, homes no longer need to wait until they are down to a two-week supply to order PPE through the portal.

A user guide and a quick reference guidance are attached with detailed instructions on how to navigate the new portal. Homes will receive email confirmation of account activation. The PPE Supply Portal requires a user account to access, so please don't try to access it until your account is activated.

If you have any questions, feedback or concerns specifically about the new ordering process, please email [SCO.Supplies@ontario.ca](mailto:SCO.Supplies@ontario.ca)

### **N95 Respirator Fit Testing Program**

The Ontario government has a steady and robust supply of the 3M Aura Health Care Particulate Respirator and Surgical Mask 1870+. The 1870+ respirator is the N95 respirator of first choice for the province and is available through the provincial PPE stockpile, which can be ordered using the PPE Supply Portal noted above. The N95 1870+ fits to over 80% of face types and provides the highest level of comfort and protection to frontline workers that require fitted respirators.

To assist homes to move to the 1870+ respirator, a provincial fit testing program was launched on September 22, 2022, which is accessible to long-term care homes. Homes can apply to have their staff and caregivers fit tested directly via the online form on the [Ontario Together](#) portal. The program requires a minimum of 10 individuals to be fit tested at one time. For more information or questions about the

N95 Respirator Fit Testing Program, please see the attached Fact Sheet or contact the N95 Respiratory Fit Testing Program at [Fit.Testing@ontario.ca](mailto:Fit.Testing@ontario.ca).

### **Support for Homes with Fall Preparedness**

The ministry, in collaboration with OH, want to ensure all long-term care homes are prepared for the challenging respiratory illness season. To continue to support homes with their ongoing preparedness, OH is reaching out to some homes to engage them in a supportive conversation, including discussing fall preparedness checklists, sharing resources, best practices and contacts. Homes may also reach out to the OH regional contacts for LTC homes:

- **Toronto:** Rose Cook, VP, Clinical Programs, [Rose.Cook@ontariohealth.ca](mailto:Rose.Cook@ontariohealth.ca)
- **East:** Farrah Hirji, VP, Capacity, Access and Flow, [Farrah.Hirji@ontariohealth.ca](mailto:Farrah.Hirji@ontariohealth.ca) and Carl Bonura, Director, Capacity, Access and Flow, [Carl.Bonura@ontariohealth.ca](mailto:Carl.Bonura@ontariohealth.ca)
- **North East and North West:** Jennifer MacKinnon VP, Capacity, Access and Flow, [Jennifer.MacKinnon@ontariohealth.ca](mailto:Jennifer.MacKinnon@ontariohealth.ca);
- **West:** Emily Christoffersen, VP, Capacity Access and Flow, [Emily.Christoffersen@ontariohealth.ca](mailto:Emily.Christoffersen@ontariohealth.ca); Blair Philippi, Director, Capacity, Access and Flow, [Blair.Philippi@ontariohealth.ca](mailto:Blair.Philippi@ontariohealth.ca); and Shirley Koch, Director, Capacity, Access and Flow, [Shirley.Koch@ontario.ca](mailto:Shirley.Koch@ontario.ca)
- **Central:** Christine Nuernberger, VP, Capacity, Access & Flow, [Christine.Nuernberger@ontariohealth.ca](mailto:Christine.Nuernberger@ontariohealth.ca); and Melissa Mei, Director, System Strategy, Planning, Design & Implementation, [Melissa.Mei@ontariohealth.ca](mailto:Melissa.Mei@ontariohealth.ca)

Thank you again for your ongoing efforts in keeping residents safe while ensuring good quality of care. As always, should you have questions you may contact us at [MLTCPandemicResponse@ontario.ca](mailto:MLTCPandemicResponse@ontario.ca).

Sincerely,



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Jeff Butler  
Assistant Deputy Minister  
LTC Operations

Attachments: COVID-19 Vaccine Q&As, COVID-19 Vaccine Comparison Chart, Updated COVID-19 Vaccine Consent Form, Memo: Paxlovid Prescribing in Primary Care: Testing and Tools, Q&A for LTC Home Administrators – Paxlovid Dispensing, PPE Supply Portal User Guide, PPE Supply Portal Quick Reference Guide, N95 Fit Testing Program Fact Sheet

c: Nancy Matthews, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Long-Term Care (MLTC) and Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility (MSAA)

Dr. Catherine Zahn, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Health (MOH)  
Renu Kulendran, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Public and Business Service  
Delivery (MPBSD)  
Dr. Kieran Moore, Chief Medical Officer of Health  
Dr. Barbara Yaffe, Associate Chief Medical Officer of Health  
Alison Blair, Associate Deputy Minister, Pandemic Response and Recovery,  
and Health Integration and Partnerships (MOH)  
Michael Hillmer, Assistant Deputy Minister, Digital and Analytics Strategy  
(MOH)  
Doug Kent, Assistant Deputy Minister, Supply Chain Ontario, MPBSD  
Lisa Levin, Chief Executive Officer, AdvantAge Ontario  
Donna Duncan, Chief Executive Officer, Ontario Long Term Care Association  
Monika Turner, Association of Municipalities of Ontario  
Michael Jacek, Association of Municipalities of Ontario  
Colleen Geiger, President and CEO (Acting), Public Health Ontario  
Matthew Anderson, President and CEO, Ontario Health  
Cynthia Martineau, CEO, Home and Community Care Support Services