

**Key Messages to Support Residents and Families**  
**Temporary Enhanced Measures in LTC Homes**  
**December 14, 2021**

- The Ministry of Long-Term Care is implementing temporary enhanced measures in light of the highly transmissible Omicron variant.
- These temporary enhanced and responsive measures are necessary to provide optimal safety and support to residents while balancing the mental and emotional well-being of residents and their families, and to safeguard the staff who are critical to the care of residents.
- Enhanced measures include:
  - Enhanced surveillance testing for all staff and anyone entering the home, regardless of vaccination status
  - Vaccination requirements for general visitors and caregivers
  - New visitor limits
  - Day absences limited to residents who are fully vaccinated
  - Suspended overnight absences for social purposes
  - Cohorting for some higher-risk activities singing and dancing, in addition to dining
  - Large group activities discouraged
- In addition to the enhanced measures, all residents, staff and caregivers are strongly urged to receive a booster / third dose as they become eligible, as the latest available evidence shows that three doses of vaccine are more effective against the Omicron variant than two doses.
- Everyone is reminded of the importance of remaining vigilant with public health measures, such as masking and social distancing, both in the home and in the community.

## **Questions & Answers**

### **1. Why restrict unvaccinated caregivers from entering the home?**

Answer: Caregivers are essential to the well-being of residents. It is why the ministry has given lead-time for caregivers to receive their first dose by December 20<sup>th</sup> and all required doses by February 21, 2022. Post February 21<sup>st</sup>, unvaccinated caregivers would only be able to enter the home to visit residents receiving end of life care or if they have a valid medical exemption. In these instances they would be limited to the residents' room.

During the transition period leading to the February 21<sup>st</sup> deadline, caregivers who are not fully vaccinated would also be limited to the residents' room, as well as being subject to the increased testing requirements and ongoing PPE requirements.

## **2. Why restrict residents from seeing their unvaccinated grandchildren?**

Answer: As Omicron continues to accelerate, it is the Ministry's top priority to keep COVID-19 out of homes.

Children who are not fully vaccinated pose a high risk of the virus entering the home. Children may be exposed to viruses in school, daycare and other settings. In addition, COVID-19 cases among children aged 5-11 have been showing the highest growth of new cases in recent weeks.

Infants under the age of one are not considered visitors and can enter the home (testing and vaccination requirements do not apply to them). Fully vaccinated visitors, including children aged 5-11 are permitted into the home.

## **3. What proof of vaccination are homes allowed to accept?**

Answer: Starting January 4<sup>th</sup>, 2021, all individuals will be required to use the QR code as proof of vaccination. The QR code can be used digitally or by printing a paper copy. Those without a phone or a computer may get their QR code at their local library, Service Ontario center, or call the Provincial Vaccine Contact Centre at 1-833-943-3900 to have their vaccine certificate mailed to them. Those with medical exemptions will also be required to have a QR code. Until that time, homes can continue accepting vaccination proof by QR code or using the receipt provided at the time of vaccination.

## **4. Aren't there other measures that homes could take, such as increasing PPE for unvaccinated individuals rather than restricting caregivers and general visitors?**

Answer: These enhanced measures are necessary to provide safety to residents and staff in a concerted and collective effort to reduce the risk of the virus entering the home, in light of the highly transmissible Omicron variant.

All homes and individuals should follow the appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) requirements as advised by the Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health and Public Health Ontario Infection Prevention and Containment

(IPAC) best practices. There is no difference in PPE best practices for vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals.

**5. How can residents, staff and caregivers obtain their COVID-19 vaccine or booster doses?**

Answer: Residents, staff and caregivers are eligible for a booster / third dose if at least six months have passed since their last dose. The booster / third dose is being offered to strengthen protection against severe illness, hospitalization, and death from COVID-19 since evidence has shown gradual waning immunity six months after receiving the second dose. It is critical that everyone living and working in a long-term care home is protected to the greatest extent possible, in particular given the highly transmissible Omicron variant.

All residents are able to receive their third dose vaccine in the home. Wherever possible homes will also be administering these vaccines to staff and caregivers. Where homes are not able to directly administer vaccines onsite, staff and caregivers can go book an appointment on the provincial [COVID-19 vaccination portal](#), by calling the Provincial Vaccine Contact Centre at 1-833-943-3900, or through [select pharmacies](#) and primary care settings.

Individuals who have not yet received a second dose and who wish to receive their second dose at an interval less than 8 weeks from their first dose must call the Provincial Vaccine Contact Centre or their local public health unit.

In addition, as a reminder, the Johnson & Johnson (Janssen) vaccine is now available to individuals aged 18 and over who have an allergy or contraindication to mRNA vaccines or at the request of an individual who has not yet been vaccinated by contacting their public health unit.

**6. Are there restrictions on resident activities within the home?**

Answer: To support the mental health and well-being of residents, activities within the home, such as communal dining, social activities, and exercise classes, continue to be permitted, but large group activities are discouraged and residents should be cohorted for higher-risk activities, such as dining, singing and dancing. Resident Councils' play an important role in the home and should continue to meet.

**7. Why restrict overnight absences for social purposes? What happens if a resident leaves overnight for social purposes?**

Answer: Overnight absences for social purposes have been suspended, based on advice of the Chief Medical Officer of Health and rapidly increasing community transmission of Delta and Omicron variants.

Extended periods of time in the community may create a significant risk of exposing residents to the virus, in particular the highly transmissible Omicron variant, which increases the risk of COVID-19 coming into the long-term care home. According to recent data from the UK, the risk of household transmission is 3.2 times higher with the Omicron variant than it was with the Delta variant.

Residents who wish to leave the home overnight for social purposes will be temporarily discharged and will need to follow the appropriate discharge process. To return to the home, the resident will need to follow the re-admission protocol. All residents may continue to leave the home for essential, medical or compassionate absences.

**8. What if an unvaccinated general visitor shows up at a long-term care home?**

Answer: Unvaccinated general visitors are permitted to visit residents outdoors where feasible, after being tested or showing proof of a negative test from the previous day. General visitors are also able to take fully vaccinated residents for day absences although safe practices and behaviours should be explained and strongly encouraged. When returning from a day absence, residents will need to follow enhanced symptom screening and testing requirements, and may need to be isolated if they had a known exposure and/or if they test positive.