

Ministry of Long-Term Care

Office of the Associate Deputy
Minister, Long-Term Care Policy
and Pandemic Response

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Ministère des Soins de longue durée

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December 14, 2021

MEMORANDUM TO: Long-Term Care Home Licensees

FROM: Erin Hannah
Associate Deputy Minister
LTC Policy and Pandemic Response

SUBJECT: Enhanced Measures for LTC Homes

We are experiencing a rapid increase in COVID-19 cases in Ontario. This trend is expected to continue over the coming weeks as a result of the highly transmissible Omicron variant. Based on recommendations from the Chief Medical Officer of Health, I am writing to notify homes of temporary enhanced measures that are required right away to reduce the risk of the virus entering the home.

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. We need you and your leadership teams to work quickly and collectively to communicate these changes to residents and their families and your staff and reinforce the need for vigilance and best practice.

In addition to the enhanced measures outlined below, homes should:

- Strongly urge residents, caregivers and staff to get a third / booster dose of COVID-19 vaccine. Emerging evidence suggests that three doses of vaccine are significantly more effective against the Omicron variant than two doses. To ensure timely access to boosters, homes that have not already onboarded for independent, onsite vaccine administration should work with their local public health units to do so;
- Review and update their Fall Preparedness Plans/Checklist (template attached);

- Review Infection Prevention and Control (IPAC) and ventilation resources and tools to ensure best practices are being followed and ensure staff have IPAC refreshers;
- Avoid large group social activities for residents and staff inside homes and ensure staff know the current provincial and local rules about social gatherings generally;
- Ensure everyone is reminded of the importance of remaining vigilant with public health measures, such as masking while in the home and social distancing, both in the home and in the community.

Enhanced Measures

Our LTC homes are part of the fabric of communities. Higher community transmission means an increased risk for residents and staff – we must take steps now to reduce the risk of COVID-19 entering long-term care homes.

In Effect No Later than December 15 at 7pm:

- General visitors must be fully vaccinated (or have a valid medical exemption) to come into homes, unless they are visiting a resident receiving end of life care.
 - Infants under 1 year of age are not considered visitors and may enter the home without being subject to surveillance testing.
 - As children under 5 years old are unable to receive a COVID-19 vaccine, they will be unable to come into a home at this time.
- Outdoor visits can occur regardless of vaccination status where homes have outdoor visiting spaces that support safe visits (e.g., physical distancing).

Effective December 17 (unless otherwise noted):

- All staff, students, volunteers and caregivers must be surveillance tested at least 2 times per week. Homes may wish to go beyond this province-wide requirement based on local factors.
- All general visitors and support workers must be tested each time they attend at a home unless they have a negative test from the previous day.
- All currently designated caregivers must provide proof of a first dose of vaccine (or a valid medical exemption) by December 20 to enter a home, unless they are visiting a resident receiving end of life care. These caregivers will then have until February 21 to be fully vaccinated. Until fully vaccinated, these caregivers will be limited to visiting their loved one in their room.
- A maximum of 2 caregivers can be designated by a resident and any newly designated caregivers must be fully vaccinated to enter the home. If a resident currently has more than 2 designated caregivers, that does not have to change. These changes are effective immediately.

- A maximum of 2 people (caregivers and visitors) per resident at a time for indoor visits, and 4 people (caregivers and visitors) per resident at a time for outdoor visits.
- Residents who are fully vaccinated may continue to leave the home for day absences and must be reminded of public health safety measures to follow when they are outside of the home. Social overnight absences are being suspended at this time due to the increased transmissibility of the Omicron variant.
 - Residents who wish to leave the home overnight for social purposes will need to follow the appropriate discharge process, as well as the re-admission protocol when they return at a later date.
 - All residents may continue to leave the home for essential, medical or compassionate absences.

To support the mental health and well-being of residents, activities within the home, such as communal dining and social activities continue to be permitted, however there should be no large group activities and residents should be cohorted for higher-risk activities like singing and dancing, in addition to dining. Further, with respect to dining, fully vaccinated caregivers may continue to join residents for communal dining / family-style meals, while remaining masked at all times.

A table detailing all the requirements and guidance for long-term care homes is attached along with the Minister's Directives as well as key messages to support your communication with residents and their families.

The updated Guidance document, Immunization Policy Resource Guide and FAQs will be shared shortly. We will also be providing homes with additional support materials that can be provided to staff, residents and their families. Minister's Directives and Guidance documents will be available online shortly.

Ordering Test Kits

To rapidly implement the new testing requirements, homes are encouraged to assess and maximize their current supply of rapid antigen tests, and to ensure sufficient time for ordering and distribution of additional test kits through existing processes. Homes can expect to receive their tests in 3-4 business days, and, given service disruptions over the holidays, should place their orders for new tests this week to guarantee shipments before the holiday period.

Personal Protective Equipment

Homes are encouraged to assess their inventory of PPE to ensure sufficient stock, in particular over the holidays when distribution timelines may be affected. Homes should follow existing supply chain processes for acquiring PPE, with a reminder that the provincial PPE stockpile is available if you are experiencing a supply of 14 days or less, by completing the [Critical PPE Requests-Intake Form](#) to escalate to your Regional Lead. In addition, as communicated on November 30, 2021, the province will soon be launching the Supplementary Stockpile Access Program, which will

provide PPE to in-scope sectors, free of charge. Further details will be shared shortly about how and when long-term care homes can begin to access PPE through this program. Finally, please note that the Chief Medical Officer of Health Directive #5 prevails.

We recognize that these additional enhanced measures will be particularly difficult for residents and families at this time of year and we will monitor available evidence and work closely with the Chief Medical Officer of Health to continually assess the situation. We encourage homes to work with their home community to find and support safe opportunities for residents to visit with loved ones and interact with their fellow residents or to support virtual connections where in-person opportunities are not possible.

As always, our continued appreciation for the commitment of you and your teams as we take these difficult but necessary steps to safeguard long-term care homes. Please contact us at MLTCPandemicResponse@ontario.ca should you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Original signed by

Erin Hannah
Associate Deputy Minister
LTC Policy and Pandemic Response

Attachments:

- Summary of requirements and guidance for Long-Term Care Homes Effective December 17th
- Key messages to be shared with residents and their families
- Minister's Directives

c: Nancy Matthews, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Long-Term Care (MLTC)
Dr. Catherine Zahn, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Health (MOH)
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 Division, Ministry of Health (MOH)
Melissa Thomson, Assistant Deputy Minister, MOH
Michael Hillmer, Assistant Deputy Minister, Capacity Planning and Analytics Division, MOH/MLTC
Matthew Anderson, President and CEO, Ontario Health
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
Jeff Butler, Assistant Deputy Minister, Operations, MLTC