

**Ministry of Long-Term Care**

Assistant Deputy Minister  
Long-Term Care Operations

8th Floor, 438 University Ave.  
Toronto ON M5G 2K8  
Tel.: (416) 327-7461  
Fax: (416) 327-7603

**Ministère des Soins de longue durée**

Sous-ministre adjointe  
Opérations relatives aux soins de longue durée

438, avenue University, 8e étage  
Toronto ON M5G 2K8  
Téléphone: (416) 327-7461  
Télécopieur: (416) 327-7603



October 6, 2022

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

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

**SUBJECT:** Long-Term Care Pandemic Response Updates

---

Thank you for your diligent and continued work over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic to optimize health and safety of residents and staff in long-term care.

While the 7<sup>th</sup> wave of COVID-19 has plateaued, we know COVID-19 will continue to evolve and circulate in the community and that other respiratory viruses, including influenza, will begin circulating. However, we also know how to protect ourselves and prevent severe illness, and it is within this context we have been working in collaboration with the Ministry of Health in updating our long-term care response to reflect the current circumstances and the best available evidence.

Changes have been made to the COVID-19 guidance document for long-term care homes in Ontario (“the guidance document”) to balance the need to keep residents safe, while ensuring isolation and other public health guidance are suitable for this point in the pandemic, where there is a high degree of community immunity and availability of vaccine boosters. The changes take effect October 14, 2022, to provide some lead time for communication within your homes’ community and implementation, recognizing some homes might need more time to transition.

**COVID-19 screening**

As it is an important tool aimed at reducing the risk of infectious illnesses within homes, COVID-19 screening is still required. While active screening remains recommended for visitors and caregivers, long-term care homes can now shift to passive screening for staff to embed this practice into the regular practices of long-term care homes. Daily screening of *residents* is to be continued to monitor for signs and symptoms of COVID-19.

The [Ministry of Health's COVID-19 Screening Tool for Long-Term Care Homes and Retirement Homes](#) was recently updated and remains available to you and your teams to help facilitate your screening process.

### **Screening and testing after an absence**

While active screening of residents upon return from an absence will continue, requirements for testing residents after an absence will be removed, unless they are symptomatic. Please note, as a reminder, that isolation of residents following an absence is not required unless they have symptoms or have tested positive for COVID-19.

### **Masking**

Masking remains a requirement for long-term care staff, as well as for visitors and others entering long-term care homes. However, recognizing that long-term care residents miss seeing the faces of their loved ones, the ministry is recommending rather than requiring that caregivers and visitors wear masks when they are alone with a resident in their room. For residents living in shared rooms, homes should seek to designate a space to enable residents who would like to interact with their visitors without masks. When not in a one-on-one setting with a resident in their room or a designated space within the home, visitors and caregivers are still required to be masked.

### **Visitors**

Homes may now return to their regular practice of setting their own visitor policy, in accordance with available space and applicable guidance and laws. This means that the provincially set limit of 4 visitors (including caregivers) per resident at a time for indoor visits is being removed.

### **Physical distancing**

Residents, staff and visitors are encouraged to continue to practice physical distancing and urged to avoid situations like crowded places in which COVID-19 may spread more easily.

### **Ministry of Health guidance updates**

The Ministry of Health has released an updated [COVID-19 Guidance: Long-Term Care Homes, Retirement Homes and Other Congregate Living Settings for Public Health Units](#), as well as the recently updated [Management of Cases and Contacts of COVID-19 in Ontario](#). Key updates for long-term care homes to be aware of include:

- Residents who are close contacts of a person with COVID-19 are no longer required to isolate, unless they have symptoms or they are a roommate of the person with COVID-19.
- Testing of asymptomatic residents being admitted or transferred from the community or a facility that is not in outbreak is no longer recommended.
- Workers who are close contacts of individuals with COVID-19 symptoms or a positive test are able to return to work without isolating, provided they have no symptoms and follow appropriate precautions.

- The definition of a confirmed outbreak has been updated to two or more residents with COVID-19 with a common link within a 10-day period (no longer includes staff or visitors in the definition).

The changes to the definition of outbreak and to isolation requirements for close contacts in long-term care homes will help manage staff absences this fall and reduce the negative impact of prolonged and repeated isolation on residents, while still optimizing safety within long-term care homes. **Recognizing the toll that isolation has on the well-being of residents, homes are expected to follow the isolation requirements in the updated guidance, and to not go beyond these requirements unless advised to do so by their local public health unit.**

### **Outbreak Reporting**

To streamline the process of sharing LTC home outbreak status updates, a new self-reporting system will replace the current method of collecting statistical data via phone calls with ministry staff. Once implemented, this new system will allow homes to quickly and easily submit outbreak data at an appropriate time. In order to further reduce reporting burden, we will also be streamlining the amount of outbreak data collected through this process. Further details and training material on this new process will be shared in the coming weeks. Please note this does not affect the continued requirement to report outbreaks to the local public health unit as well as in the CIS system.

While this update signals continued efforts to move towards a state of learning to live with COVID-19, it remains as important as ever to continue to follow protective measures, such as staying up to date with vaccinations, screening / self-monitoring for symptoms, and adhering to infection prevention and control (IPAC) protocols, including performing hand hygiene, appropriately donning and doffing PPE, and conducting IPAC audits every two weeks unless in outbreak and weekly if the home is in outbreak (as required in the [Minister's Directive: COVID-19 response measures for LTCHs](#)).

Reintroduction of some public health measures may be needed should the circumstances of the pandemic worsen significantly in the future. We will continue to prioritize the health and safety of residents, staff and all others who attend homes, and will make decisions in consultation with the Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health.

To support the guidance changes outlined above, the updated COVID-19 guidance document for long-term care homes in Ontario, What Residents Can Expect information sheet, the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) as well as the Ministry of Health's COVID-19 Guidance: Long-Term Care Homes, Retirement Homes and Other Congregate Living Settings for Public Health Units are enclosed. The ministry will also hold webinars over the next two weeks for long-term care home operators as well as for residents, families and caregivers. Webinar details and links will be shared on LTChomes.net.

Thank you for the steadfast efforts of you and your teams to optimize safety within long-term care homes while promoting the best possible quality of life as we continue

to move through the changing landscape of this pandemic. As always, should you have questions regarding pandemic response, you may contact us at [MLTCPandemicResponse@ontario.ca](mailto:MLTCPandemicResponse@ontario.ca).

Sincerely,



Jeff Butler  
Assistant Deputy Minister  
LTC Operations

Attachments: COVID-19 Guidance Document for long-term care homes in Ontario (French to follow), MOH COVID-19 Guidance: Long-Term Care Homes, Retirement Homes and Other Congregate Living Settings for Public Health Units, What Residents Can Expect, FAQs

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)  
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, Ministry of Health (MOH)  
Michael Hillmer, Assistant Deputy Minister, Capacity Planning and Analytics, MOH/MLTC  
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