

Special Bulletin COVID-19 ALERTS



March 16, 2020

Restrictions to Visitors in Long-Term Care Homes & Suspension of Residents' Council Meetings

Dear Residents' Councils and Long-Term Care team members,

On March 13, 2020, the Ministry of Health issued a 'strong recommendation' through Dr. David Williams, the Chief Medical Officer of Health, that visitors be restricted in congregate settings, including Long-Term Care Homes across Ontario. OARC was consulted by the Ministry of Long-Term Care during the development of this memo. While we acknowledge this is a difficult decision, the recommendation is necessary to minimize the threat to residents being exposed to COVID-19.

You can read the memo here <http://www.ontarc.com/documents/CMOHMemo-VisitorsCOVID-19-2020-03-13Shared.pdf>

What does this mean?

Our Ministry of Health recommends that ONLY essential visitors be permitted to enter any Long-Term Care home, AND ONLY if they pass the active screening process at the entry doors of the home.

What is an essential visitor?

Citing the Residents' Bill of Rights (RBR) #15 the Ministry has defined an essential visitor as someone who is visiting a resident who is dying or who is gravely ill.

RBR #15 reads, "Every resident who is dying or who is very ill has the right to have family and friends present 24 hours per day."

What is Active Screening?

Everyone who enters the doors of your LTC home as a visitor will be met with someone who will engage in a process of screening for safe entry. Remember that only essential visitors will be permitted to enter. As a minimum, a few questions will be asked about symptoms of illness, recent travel history, and possible exposure to people who are ill with COVID-19. If the person passes the screening process, he/she will be permitted entry into the building and will be instructed by a LTC home team member in the appropriate use of personal protective equipment to ensure the visit is safe. If the person fails the screening process, he/she will not be permitted to enter the LTC home.

See Screening Checklist/procedures provided by the Ministry of Health here
<http://www.ontarc.com/documents/ScreeningChecklist2020-03-13-Shared.pdf>

How long is this restriction in place?

The restrictions on visiting in LTC homes are in place “until further notice.” It is impossible to predict an accurate end point for this restriction. Active monitoring of COVID-19 continues. OARC was assured that our Ministry of Health will lift these restrictions as soon as possible.

What about Residents’ Council meetings?

In alignment with the timing of this memo, OARC recommends that Residents’ Council meetings be postponed until further notice. Social distancing is an important preventative practice, so minimizing group activities is an important step in reducing the risk of exposure to COVID-19.

Celebrating excellence, addressing concerns and experiencing peer support through Residents’ Council meetings/activities are important to living well in LTC. OARC acknowledges this is an extremely difficult time, and we assure you that the decision was not made lightly.

OARC extends heartfelt thanks to the thousands of LTC team members who remain committed to supporting the best quality of life possible for residents. We encourage you to be patient and kind with each other and look forward to the time when you will be reunited with friends, family, co-residents! What a celebration that will be!

Please stay safe one and all.

We will continue to update you as the situation with COVID-19 progresses.

Sincerely,



Dee Lender

Executive Director

COVID19: A Joint Statement from Family Councils Ontario and Ontario Association of Residents’ Councils

Dear Residents and Families,

Late last Friday, Chief Medical Officer of Health David Williams sent out a memo to long-term care homes strongly recommending that homes only allow “essential” visitors until further notice. Essential visitors are defined as those who have a resident who is dying or very ill.

This means that, effective immediately, only essential visitors will be permitted to enter a long-term care home -- and only if they successfully pass the screening. No other visitors will be permitted to enter the long-term care home.

We understand that this decision is hard on you. Visitors are essential to resident quality of life and assure families that all is well in their loved one’s home. Please understand that this decision was not taken lightly. It has been taken to ensure the health and safety of the residents entrusted to the care of long-term care homes, their families, and the staff members

who are working hard during this time to keep residents safe and well. As the organizations that work to represent the voices of residents and families, OARC and FCO were consulted on this decision and support it. It is necessary in order to keep our residents and families safe.

Residents' health and safety is paramount. To live in a healthy manner, opportunities for social engagement, joyful interaction, peer and family support, and meaningful activities are important. We recognize that restricting opportunities for such interactions will impact residents in significant ways, opening the door for loneliness, sadness and isolation. Your visitors/families are valued contributors to the daily rhythm and life lived in your home.

We also know that many families visit daily not only for social visits, but also to take care of their loved one and provide valuable assistance at mealtimes. Not being able to see and care for your resident must be one of the most heartbreakin aspects of the pandemic. But, it is a pandemic and we need to take precautions to avoid further spread of the virus. Restricting visitors to long-term care homes is one of those precautions.

The evidence gathered so far tells us that older adults and those with underlying health issues are at higher risk of severe illness or death from COVID-19 (source:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/high-risk-complications.html>). This means that residents are at higher risk of severe illness or death. During this difficult time, please keep this in mind and remember that measures such as visitor restrictions are being implemented to save lives.

We are living through an unprecedeted time. During this time, please know that we understand and empathize with what you're going through.

To residents, we ask that you take care of yourselves and your fellow residents when you can, and try to exercise patience with those who are around you, seizing opportunities for laughter and peace.

To families, we recognize your pain and stress from being far away from your loved ones. We ask that you be patient and understand that the visitor restriction is being done to keep your loved ones safe.

To team members/staff, we can't be with you in person but we see the hard work that you are doing to keep residents safe, healthy, and engaged. Thank you.

This is a crisis. The Ontario government and long-term care homes are doing the best they can in this difficult situation. Our goal must be to reduce the possibility of COVID-19 infections in long-term care and to keep our residents safe.

We're all in this together and we'll get through it together.

With love,

Samantha Peck,
Executive Director
Family Councils Ontario



Family Councils Ontario

Dee Lender
Executive Director
Ontario Association of Residents' Councils



We encourage you to bring this information to the next Residents' Council meeting in your home. We love to hear from you - call, write or email us with your questions, suggestions and stories.



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