

April 23, 2020

COVID19: Increased Testing in Long-Term Care Homes

Dear residents and long-term care team members,

Our long-term care homes in Ontario continue to be the source of great focus and attention as we strive to contain and eliminate the spread of COVID-19. Last week, the Ontario government announced that 'increased' testing would be occurring in LTC homes. As per direction at that time, if a resident was found to be positive for COVID-19, all team members (staff) on the unit were to be tested, along with all essential visitors, residents who live in adjacent rooms and any other person who may have come into contact with that resident as assessed by Public Health.

On April 21, further action to increase testing was announced via a joint memo from the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Long-Term Care, and Chief Medical Officer of Health. This memo <http://www.ontarc.com/documents/MOHLTC/20200421MOHTestingInLTCH.pdf> gives the direction for all LTC residents and staff members to be tested. It combines what is being called "surveillance" testing and testing within homes that already have COVID-19.

The province is immediately engaging in proactive surveillance testing to understand the current status of COVID-19 in individual homes, including testing residents and staff who are showing no symptoms.

The updates include the following:

- Each Public Health Unit (PHU) should immediately begin developing a local implementation plan, in coordination with the Ontario Health region and MOLTC region to facilitate testing of every resident and staff at each LTC home.
- Although testing of residents is a priority, the plan should also enable an understanding of the prevalence of COVID-19 amongst staff, particularly asymptotically.
- This plan should be implemented as soon as possible. PHUs should prioritize homes with a "red" status and homes currently in outbreak with residents of staff showing symptoms. PHUs can use their judgment to identify additional information available

to prioritize more testing and draw on local supports to increase capacity, such as local community paramedics

The government plans to use the data collected to understand the prevalence of COVID-19 in LTC homes and inform future planning.

A second memo, supporting the first, was released April 21. Action plans that were further elaborated on are:

- Enhanced testing (testing all residents and staff in homes experiencing outbreaks or where symptoms are evident), as well as beginning surveillance testing in homes showing no symptoms of COVID-19, to get a better understanding of the prevalence and pattern of COVID-19 in LTC homes.
- Review and update risk assessments daily for every LTC home to ensure homes have what they need, when they need it. Focus is placed on infection prevention and control measures/supplies and human resources, and personal protective equipment.
- Efforts to expand the pool of workers/health human resources willing and able to help. The Ontario government as well as the Federal government have databases that are being accessed to rapidly locate, screen, place and train appropriate team members.

To view the complete memo, click here:

<http://www.ontarc.com/documents/MOHLTC/20200421MOHUpdateonPreparationsAndActions.pdf>

May these additional resources, strategies and ongoing commitment provide the needed assurance and protection for residents and team members in LTC homes.

We will get through this together.

Warmly,

Dee Lender

Executive Director, OARC