

June 12, 2020

COVID-19: Guidelines for Re-establishment of Visiting in LTCH

Dear residents and long-term care team members,

I am pleased to share with you that visiting will resume in your LTC homes, under very careful and cautious parameters. Read below for details. What I am most pleased about is the acknowledgment by government, after many weeks of discussion, that 'essential family caregivers' has been defined as anyone who provides for the social wellbeing of residents. We have heard for weeks that the negative outcomes of isolation have been dramatic and harsh. What was needed is acknowledgement that the psychosocial and emotional wellbeing of residents is critical. That has happened, and we are glad!

Guidelines for Re-establishment of Visiting in Your LTC Home:

On June 11, government announced that visiting residents in LTC homes will resume as of June 18th. This is a graduated and cautious plan. To be clear, this is not a wide opening of the doors, permitting multiple visitors to enter the building at will. This is a staged, safe and careful plan that begins with outdoor visits only, commencing one week from the release of the directive i.e. June 18th.

This step is to be celebrated! Just as the province continues opening, along a cautious path, LTC is moving in parallel but with heightened attention because LTC residents are at the centre of this crisis. Thank you for your patience, thank you for your daily determination to keep focused on the goal....and we will get there. This is just the beginning.

What does this look like?

Beginning June 18th, OUTDOOR visits may begin on a scheduled basis, supported by a staff/team member. Homes have been instructed to create a dedicated outdoor space to accommodate the visiting program. Team members will support the transfer of residents in and out of the building. The outdoor space is to be cleaned between visits. If the home enters an outbreak, all non-essential visitations must end.

For visits to occur the LTC home:

- Must not be in outbreak (has never been in outbreak or the outbreak has been resolved)
- Must develop in advance, procedures for the resumption of visits and a process to communicate the procedures with families, residents, visitors and team members
- Maintain a list of visitors
- Must accommodate at least 30 minutes per visit, one visitor per resident

Visitors must:

- Pass an active screening questionnaire administered by the home
- Attest to the home that they have tested negative within the previous 2 weeks
- Use face masks
- Not bring food/drinks for resident
- Leave any packages for the resident with team members as per the home's infection control measures
- Maintain physical distancing between themselves and the resident

One week after the Emergency Order has been lifted in Ontario, further enhancements to visiting in LTC homes is permitted. These include:

- outdoor visits may include 2 visitors per resident
- indoor visiting is permitted by essential family caregivers
 - What is an essential family caregiver?
 - An essential family caregiver is a family member, friend or neighbour who is capable of providing caregiving support (assistance with meals, social support, etc.) and has done this before in the home prior to COVID-19
- Homes may prioritize visits based on the needs of residents (clinical and/or emotional decline)
- One month (at maximum) after the Emergency Order has been lifted in Ontario, the visiting program in LTC homes will move to up to 2 visitors at a time per resident for both indoor and outdoor visits

NOTE: OARC has advocated with government for weeks that an ‘essential visitor’ must include someone who is supporting a resident in a psychosocial/emotional manner. We are pleased to see this inclusion in the definition of an essential family caregiver. The psychosocial and emotional needs of residents resulting from the trauma of isolation can be severe. We trust that LTC homes across the province will seize this opportunity to bring in the much-needed support for residents and their family members.

To read the complete documents pertaining to re-establishment of visitors in LTC homes, click here:

- News Release from the office of the Premier (June, 11, 2020), “Ontario to Resume Family Visits in Long-Term Care Homes, Retirement Homes and Other Residential Care Settings”, accessed June 11, 2020
<http://www.ontarc.com/documents/MOHLTC/20200611NRResumeVisitsLTCH.pdf>
- Ministry of Long-Term Care “Resuming Visits in Long-Term Care Homes”, accessed June 11, 2020
<http://www.ontarc.com/documents/MOHLTC/20200611MOLTCResumingVisitsGuide.pdf>

As we weather this COVID-19 storm together, we are all affected in different ways. Of primary focus for your OARC team, is the complete health and wellbeing of residents in LTC. We are happy that visiting will resume. We are happy that the definition of ‘essential family caregiver’ includes anyone who provides social support to residents, and we are happy that we are working our way through this crisis together. You, residents in LTC homes, remain our inspiration, our hope, our strength in all of this.

Sincerely,



Dee Lender
Executive Director