

December 3, 2020

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Dear Residents and Long-Term Care (LTC) Home Team Members,

As we all continue to live and work during these unprecedented times of the COVID-19 pandemic, I wanted to share with you some news and updates regarding policy development, and research.

## Holiday Season and COVID-19

With the holiday season upon us, typical and traditional celebrations and gatherings in long-term care homes must be significantly adapted. Many homes must develop and carry out early, direct, compassionate and careful guidelines that enable residents, families and team members the ability to celebrate to the greatest extent, while adhering to infection prevention and control measures due to the COVID-19 precautions. I was extremely impressed with Primacare Living Solutions Inc.'s "Christmas Season Protocol" and wanted to share it with you as an example of forward thinking and resident-centred leadership. Thank you, Jill Knowlton, Chief Operating Officer for Primacare, for sharing this with OARC. Through a purpose statement, the protocol was written to guide team members in their ability to:

- Provide residents opportunity to celebrate during the holidays
- Provide meaningful engagement, reminiscing and promote socialization in small group settings safely
- Meet those needs safely through following COVID-19 precautions

Activities that will be thoughtfully carried out include tree trimming, decorating, holiday baking, special meals, and extra-special attention paid to the 5 days that lead to Christmas Day (photo booth, card writing, movies, festive attire, etc. To read the document, please click here:

<http://www.ontarc.com/documents/bulletins/20201201ChristmasSeasonProtocolPrimacare.pdf>

## **Pilot study for a rapid COVID-19 test: The Long-Term Care (LTC) Antigen Screening Pilot**

This is a voluntary program being led by the Ministry of Health, Ministry of LTC, Public Health Ontario and Ontario Health. Using a test called “PanbioTM” that can yield results in 15 minutes, the objective of the program is to assess the value of the test as a screening tool for everyone in the LTC setting (staff, students, volunteers, caregivers and support workers, and general visitors). Results from this pilot will support an increased understanding of how rapid antigen testing could be deployed more broadly to support provincial COVID-19 response activities. Homes that are participating in this pilot program must continue all other screening and testing requirements in accordance to all directives thus far; i.e. participation in this program does not replace existing requirements. The PanbioTM test is new and must be studied in the “real world” as opposed to laboratory-based studies. Data suggests that the test may yield false negatives in people who are infected approximately 30% of the time. Long-term care homes can apply to this program by contacting the Ministry of LTC. To be eligible, the home cannot be in outbreak. Government provided an information document on November 30, 2020 containing relevant information. To read, please click here:

[http://www.ontarc.com/documents/bulletins/202011PanbioPilot\\_LTCInformationDocument.pdf](http://www.ontarc.com/documents/bulletins/202011PanbioPilot_LTCInformationDocument.pdf)

## **Personal Support Worker (PSW) Temporary Wage Enhancement**

Several weeks ago, we learned of an initiative from the Ministry of LTC to provide enhanced stabilization to the PSW workforce, that would increase the hourly wage of PSWs by \$3.00 on a temporary basis. Further details were released on November 30<sup>th</sup> and include:

- The increase in pay is retroactive to October 1, 2020
- Anticipated length of program is 26 weeks (ending March 31, 2021)
- The wage enhancement program will be reviewed on a regular basis and could be extended beyond March 31, 2021
- All eligible PSWs will receive the increase in hourly wage, regardless of whether the LTC home is in COVID-19 outbreak or not
- The first installment of the increase will be released to LTC homes in December with the second installment provided to homes in January

To read the full policy, click here:

<http://www.ontarc.com/documents/bulletins/202011FundingPolicy-PSWTemporaryWageEnhancement.pdf>

## Additional Funding for LTC homes for COVID-19 Prevention and Containment:

On November 24<sup>th</sup>, the Ministry of LTC announced the availability of the next instalment of funding designed to help with the extraordinary expenses incurred to support the prevention and containment efforts of COVID-19. Examples of approved costs include:

- Immediate 24/7 health screening to ensure staff and visitors are not ill when entering the building, and to screen residents on an ongoing basis to support early containment of any new infections
- Prevention and containment activities, such as hiring new staff to carry-out the added workload for essential services and/or to replace workers who are sick or in isolation
- Staffing recruitment and retention strategies (e.g., overtime pay, additional costs to convert part-time staff to full-time, costs to backfill staff on sick leave)
- Cleaning, equipment, and operating supplies beyond typical levels for the home
- Implementing infection control measures based on clinical evidence, advice from a physician or other regulated health practitioners with expertise in infection control
- Supporting virtual care and services for residents and staff
- Providing hotel or other accommodation to some staff to help them reduce travel or potential exposure to their families

To read the letter addressed to LTC licensees and written by Sheila Bristo, Assistant Deputy Minister, LTC Operations Division, Ministry of LTC, click here:

[http://www.ontarc.com/documents/bulletins/20201124ADMLetter\\_PreventionandContainment%20Funding.pdf](http://www.ontarc.com/documents/bulletins/20201124ADMLetter_PreventionandContainment%20Funding.pdf)

## No Co-Payment Increase this Year for LTC Residents

On November 26, the Ministry of LTC released a bulletin to LTC residents (read full bulletin here: [http://www.ontarc.com/documents/bulletins/2021WINTER\\_Co-PaymentBulletinToResidents.pdf](http://www.ontarc.com/documents/bulletins/2021WINTER_Co-PaymentBulletinToResidents.pdf)) announcing that the increase to the resident co-payment rate is suspended for the entire 2020-2021 rate cycle (July 1, 2020 – June 30, 2021). Usually, residents and their families can expect a rate increase each January. Rate increases are now scheduled to resume in July 2021.

## Updates to Visiting Policy & Access to LTC Homes

Effective November 23, updates to the visiting policy, specifically the testing of visitors comes into effect. The new requirements for testing are captured in this chart:

	LOCAL PUBLIC HEALTH UNIT LEVEL				
	Green-Prevent	Yellow-Protect	Orange-Restrict	Red-Control	Grey-Lockdown
Staff					
Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tested every two weeks</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tested weekly</li> </ul>		
Volunteers					
Caregivers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide proof of a negative COVID-19 test result in the past two weeks</li> <li>Verbally attest to not subsequently testing positive*</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide proof of a negative COVID-19 test result in the past week</li> <li>Verbally attest to not subsequently testing positive*</li> </ul>		
Support workers					
General Visitors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide proof of a negative COVID-19 test result in the past two weeks</li> <li>Verbally attest to not subsequently testing positive*</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Not applicable; visits not permitted.</li> </ul>		
*Unless the support worker or visitor requires immediate access in an emergency or palliative situation.					

**\*\*Note:** If LTC homes are located in Orange, Red or Grey area, staff, students and volunteers are tested weekly. If LTC homes are located in a Green or Yellow area, testing is done every two weeks.

General visitors are not permitted into homes that are in Orange, Red or Grey.

The Ministry of LTC also released an updated “Frequently Asked Questions” (FAQ) document to support understanding and adherence to the COVID-19 Visiting Policy. The document poses and answers 55 questions. I’ve chosen to mention just a few of the questions now and encourage you to review the entire document at your convenience.

**QUESTION:** Can homes in public health unit regions in the Green-Prevent or Yellow-Protect levels restrict visitors, including caregivers, based on the visitor living in public health unit regions in the Orange-Restrict level or higher?

**ANSWER:** Homes in public health unit regions in the Green-Prevent or Yellow-Protect levels may not restrict visitors, including caregivers, based on the visitor living in public health unit regions in the Orange-Restrict level or higher. The health and safety of

residents and staff in long-term care homes is paramount. Visitors should consider their personal health and susceptibility to the virus and that of the residents and staff in determining whether visiting a long-term care home is appropriate.

**QUESTION:** Could homes restrict the number of caregivers or general visitors in order to protect the health and safety of residents, staff and visitors?

**ANSWER:** Yes, the policy provides guidance on the maximum number of visitors that may be permitted per resident at a time. Homes must ensure that the home is a safe and secure environment for its residents. Homes have the discretion to further restrict the number of visitors, provided they permit the following as per the COVID-19 Visiting Policy and subject to direction from the local public health unit:

- At least one caregiver per resident at a time.
- At least one visit per resident per week from at least one general visitor per resident at a time, as long as the home is in a public health unit region in the Green-Prevent or Yellow-Protect levels, the home is not in outbreak and the resident is not self-isolating or symptomatic.

In exercising this discretion, homes should consider:

- Any active outbreaks in the home
- The physical/infrastructure characteristics of the home
- Needs of residents, including their clinical and emotional well-being
- The total number of visitors in the home

The local public health unit may provide direction and/or restrictions on visitors to the home, depending on the specific situation.

**QUESTION:** What are the rules for visits by multiple visitors, such as a group of relatives, seeking to see a loved-one at the same time?

**ANSWER:** Under Directive #3, the home's visitor policy must indicate that residents may receive up to a maximum of 2 general visitors at a time, so long as the resident is not self-isolating or symptomatic and the home is located in a public health unit region in the Green-Protect or Yellow-Prevent levels and is not in outbreak. The home may need to further limit the number of general visitors at a time to maintain safety, based on the physical/infrastructure characteristics of the home; however, at minimum, the home should allow residents 1 visit by a general visitor per week, lasting no less than 30 minutes

**QUESTION:** Can homes ask a person visiting a very ill or palliative resident to verbally attest or demonstrate that they have received a negative COVID-19 test result?

**ANSWER:** Homes may not ask a person who is visiting a very ill or palliative resident to verbally attest or demonstrate that they have received a negative COVID-19 test result and not subsequently tested positive.

**QUESTION:** What is the minimum age required for a visitor?

**ANSWER:** A designated caregiver must be at least 18 years of age. There is no minimum age required for general visitors. General visitors younger than 14 years of age should be accompanied by an adult and must follow all applicable infection prevention and control precautions (IPAC) that are in place at the home.

To read the COVID-19 Visiting Policy, click here:

<http://www.ontarc.com/documents/bulletins/20201123COVID-19VisitingPolicy.pdf>

To read the Frequently Asked Questions document, click here:

<http://www.ontarc.com/documents/bulletins/20201123FAQsCOVID-19VisitingPolicy.pdf>

In closing, I want to extend to you, OARC's warmest of holiday greetings. May this season, and those you are with, surround you with peace.

From our team to you,



Dee Lender  
Executive Director, OARC