

April 15, 2021

Stay-at-home order and Call to Action: From Hospital to Home

Dear Residents and LTC Team Members,

In recent days, we have seen a dramatic increase in the number of people diagnosed with COVID-19. What is now called the 3rd wave of the pandemic, is causing significant stresses in our health care system, notably in hospitals across Ontario. Thankfully, LTC homes remain quite stable with most residents fully vaccinated and more and more staff/team members receiving their vaccinations each day. With the rise of cases in the community, a couple of changes have been made under government direction, with great urgency.

- 1) Stay-at-home order
- 2) Call to Action: From Hospital to Home

Both developments may impact residents in your LTC homes, and I wanted to share some information with you, hoping that it will provide clarity and give you the information you need so you know what you can expect.

1. Stay-at-home order:

Every citizen in Ontario has been asked to remain in their home, leaving only for essential reasons (e.g., to go to work, to purchase groceries or medicine, to exercise). Even students in public schools will stay home, attend classes and learn through utilizing technology.

You may wonder how the stay-at-home order affects you as a resident in your LTC home. On April 9th, 2021, The Ministry of LTC released a Q & A (question and answer) document for LTC homes to explain how the order affects life and work in LTC homes. The document also recognizes changes to what is known as “Directive #3”, a set of requirements that homes are to follow specific to COVID-19 precautions and procedures. **To read Directive #3, [click here](#).**

The Q & A document lists 20 questions and corresponding answers. We have list a few of these questions with abbreviated answers. **To read the full document containing all the questions with full answers, [click here](#)**

- **Can residents participate in physical activity such as walks in the immediate area of the home during a stay-at-home order?**

Yes. Just as people living outside of LTC homes are permitted to participate in outdoor exercise (considered essential), residents in LTC homes can do so (if the residents are not under isolation requirements).

- **Can essential caregivers enter the home during a stay-at-home order?**

Yes.

- **Are “window” visits from general visitors permitted during a stay-at-home order?**

This is up to the discretion of the LTC home’s management, keeping in mind that it is important to find ways to keep residents emotionally connected to their families.

Updates to “Directive #3”:

- **Why has the definition of a COVID-19 outbreak in LTC homes been updated?**

Now, an ‘outbreak’ is defined as at least **2** lab-confirmed cases, whereas prior to April 7th, an outbreak was defined by **1** lab-confirmed case. With the successful vaccine roll out in LTC homes thus far, the number of COVID-19 infections has dramatically dropped. This new definition aligns with what is being used in some other provinces and countries.

- **How will the outbreak definition update benefit LTC homes?**

The definition will provide opportunity for a better balance between health and safety of residents with their mental, emotional and physical well-being. When a home is declared in outbreak, severe restrictions are put into place including isolation of residents. With the new definition, residents not at risk will be able to continue participating in regular small group activities and visits.

- **What clarification is being made to the definition of a short-term absence as set out in Directive 3?**

As of April 7, a short-term absence **DOES NOT** include a resident going for a walk or participating in a physical activity either on or off the premises of the LTC home’s property. Therefore:

- homes should not deny residents’ desire to go for a walk
- homes must provide residents with a medical mask
- homes must remind residents to follow public health measures including physical distancing, hand washing, etc.
- residents should avoid socialization when they are out

- residents should be screened upon their return, but they are **NOT REQUIRED TO BE TESTED OR QUARANTINED**

- **What else can homes do to support residents' wellness?**

Homes have been asked to support the resumption of small group social activities where no hand contact is required and to create opportunities for caregivers to be with their loved ones outside of the resident's room.

2. Call to Action: From Hospital to Home:

On Friday April 9th, the Ministry of LTC and Ontario Health called an urgent meeting with LTC licensees/owners to explain the immediate need to transfer people from hospital to LTC homes in Ontario. With the increase of COVID-19 cases in the broader community (wave 3 of the pandemic), there has been a dramatic increase in the number of people requiring hospitalization. **The specific request coming from the Ministry and Ontario Health is that LTC homes examine how many people can be safely admitted from hospital to LTC homes in the next 1-2 weeks, with the goal of moving at a minimum, 1,500 people. To read the memo sent to LTC home licensees, [click here](#).**

The patients who are being considered as candidates for moving into LTC homes currently occupy what are called ALC (Alternative Level of Care) beds. These are patients in hospital who occupy beds, but who no longer require the intensity of care provided by a hospital. The health status of these patients has plateaued or stabilized, they are generally at low risk for rapid decline and are not in search of new additional diagnoses. For a comprehensive guide to ALC patients, click here: <https://www.cihi.ca/en/guidelines-to-support-alc-designation>.

Many LTC homes currently have vacancies for a range of reasons. Among them are because homes:

- No longer have 3-4 residents to a room (to reduce risk of COVID-19 transmission)
- Lack sufficient staff/team member support to provide care for a fully occupied home
- Require empty rooms for COVID-19 isolation purposes if needed

While LTC homes were hardest hit with the COVID-19 pandemic over the past year, they are currently in recovery mode, and many may be able to readmit/admit alleviating some of the stress in hospitals. But this is a complicated process.

To be clear, homes are asked to indicate how many people can be **SAFELY** and **APPROPRIATELY** accommodated as new residents, and to put processes in place immediately to welcome these new residents within the coming 2 weeks. The plan is to move ALC patients who are currently waiting for/approved for a LTC home, not other patients whose needs cannot be met in a LTC home environment. While there is significant pressure to move as many people as possible from hospital to LTC, it would be unwise, unsafe and negligent to move people whose needs cannot be met. An increased volume of residents, especially an influx of new residents adds additional demands on your team members as they strive to get to know each new resident, develop respective care plans, and orient each person to their new home. This call to action was announced just as COVID restrictions have been eased via government directives i.e., residents are able to participate in small group social activities and go out for walks/exercise.

If your home is one that will be welcoming new residents in the very near future, I urge you to ask your management team/Administrator for the plan that is in place to ensure that:

- Current residents' needs (physical, social, emotional) continue to be met including small group social activities
- Risk of COVID-19 entering your home remains very low

In advance of these anticipated admissions, the Deputy Minister of LTC, Richard Steele, wrote a letter to residents and family members to explain the call to action and what you can expect. Highlights of this letter, dated April 14th, include:

- Every home has been asked to do everything they can in the next 2 weeks to admit or readmit hospitalized patients who are waiting for a LTC home
- Welcoming new residents must be done safely - maintaining safety for current residents and the new residents
- Homes must have the necessary staff/team members to accommodate these moves
- Homes are asked to “maximize opportunities for residents and families to engage in activities that bring them joy, comfort and dignity, and give them back a sense of choice in their homes and lives”
- OARC is being consulted regularly to ensure that residents' voices are included in discussions to help “shape the future” of LTC

To read the letter in full, [click here](#):

As this message draws to a close, please be reassured that OARC remains steadfast and determined to keep residents informed, to advocate for your rights, and to support you as you continue to navigate the changes brought about by the pandemic. Extended outbreaks have created many discouraging barriers for Residents' Councils who are struggling to stay connected, but slowly, promising headway is being made. We ask LTC teams to remember that residents are your **partners** in the process. Communication must run two ways. Residents appreciate the great lengths teams have gone to keep them safe, and they welcome opportunities to work alongside you as we begin to rebuild, heal and move forward. Knowledge is empowering and residents are seeking information.

For support on enhancing communication with residents, please reach out to us anytime.

Thank you for reading this bulletin. Please stay in touch. We want to hear from you!

Warmly,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Dee Lender". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned to the left of the printed name.

Dee Lender

Executive Director, OARC