

June 7, 2021

Changes to Residents' Absences and Visitor Policy

Dear Residents and LTC Team Members,

It seems that few days go by without a change or advancement in guidance and directives pertaining to COVID-19. I am writing to you now to share recent announcements from government that will have a positive impact.

Changes related to Residents' Absences and Visitor Policy:

Associate Deputy Minister for Pandemic Recovery and Response, Erin Hannah, released a memo and accompanying directives on June 3rd, that affect both residents' ability to leave their home (absences) and receive visitors. The changes are effective as of **June 9, 2021**.

Here is a quote from Erin's memo to LTC homes:

"I know we were all lifted by the heartwarming stories of families reuniting after almost a year, and today I write to you to share additional changes we are making to improve quality of life for residents as Ontario progresses along the Roadmap to Reopen. As a next step, the ministry has consulted with the Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health to implement the following changes to Directive 3 and the MLTC Guidance Document and Visitor Policy." – Erin Hannah, AsDM

To help make sense of the changes, and how they are layered into existing policy and parameters, the MLTC has also provided an updated Question and Answer document and a very useful 'chart' that shows the current situation.

Highlights from the memo:

To access the full memo, click here:

https://www.ontarc.com/documents/MOHLTC/20210603AsDMMemo_UpcomingChange_sRelatedtoAbsencesandVisitorsPolicy.pdf

- Social and temporary absences for those residents who are fully immunized will now be permitted

- One general visitor at a time is permitted, regardless of their immunization status, to visit a resident indoors. The conditions of this allowance are that the resident being visited, is living with health and/or mobility conditions that make it next to impossible for him/her to visit outdoors. The general visitor must adhere to physical distancing, wear appropriate PPE and adhere to other infection protection and control measures the home has in place. The general visitor must also be actively screened and undergo a rapid antigen test AND AWAIT A NEGATIVE RESULT before moving beyond the entry way of the home.
- Regardless of resident and visitor vaccination status, brief hugs can now take place.
- Where both the resident and visitors are fully immunized close physical contact, including handholding, can now take place safely. Hand hygiene and masking continue to be important.
- Essential Caregivers and general visitors who are fully immunized are not required to wear eye protection whether visiting indoors or outdoors.

Highlights from the Question-and-Answer Document:

To access the full document, click here:

<https://www.ontarc.com/documents/MOHLTC/20210603UpdatedDirective3andGuidanceDocumentFAQ.pdf>

- **QUESTION:** Who determines if a resident can participate in an outdoor/indoor visit or not?

ANSWER: Homes know their residents, including their health status and mobility limitations. This exception is only for in instances where outdoor visits are extremely challenging or not possible. This may include the resident’s level of physical functioning, the type and level of assistance that is required to support the resident in participating in an outdoor visit, including any disease diagnoses, health conditions and their overall wellbeing.

- **QUESTION:** My home does not have any/enough outdoor space. Can general visitors visit indoors?

ANSWER: Outdoor visits may also take place in the general vicinity of the home. Homes should leverage nearby amenities such as local parks or parkettes to enable family and friends to visit their loved ones. As of June 9th, general visitors are only allowed indoors for residents whose mobility limitations or health condition makes outdoor visits highly unlikely or impossible.

- **QUESTION:** If both essential caregivers come for an outdoor visit, how many are allowed inside the home?

ANSWER: There is no change to this policy. A maximum of one caregiver per resident may visit inside the home at a time.

- **QUESTION:** Can general visitors visit indoors during inclement weather?

ANSWER: No. As of June 9th, a maximum of 1 general visitor per resident at a time may visit indoors where a resident's mobility limitations or health condition makes outdoor visits a highly unlikely or impossible.

- **QUESTION:** Can general visitors have close contact with a fully immunized resident?

ANSWER: Where either the resident or general visitors are not fully immunized the general visitor must maintain two metres physical distance from residents, however, brief hugs are permitted regardless of immunization status.

Where both the resident and the general visitor are both fully immunized close physical contact is permitted. Close physical contact between a fully immunized resident and a fully immunized caregiver is permitted.

- **QUESTION:** How are homes supposed to determine if a general visitor is fully immunized?

ANSWER: Homes can establish their own policies and/or requirements to determine if a general visitor is fully immunized. They should remind all visitors at entry of the requirements.

- **QUESTION:** Are general visitors permitted when the home is in outbreak?

ANSWER: General visitors are not permitted to visit residents indoors if the entire home is in outbreak or the resident is symptomatic or isolating under Droplet and Contact precautions. If only a portion of the home is in outbreak, residents who are unable to participate in an outdoor visit and who are unaffected by that outbreak may receive a maximum of 1 general visitor, in addition to 1 caregiver. General visitors are permitted to visit residents outdoors provided the resident is not symptomatic or isolating under Droplet and Contact precautions. This means that where a portion of the home is in outbreak, residents unaffected by that outbreak may still have outdoor visits.

- **QUESTION:** Do homes have a choice to continue the restriction on general visitors?

ANSWER: Per the Residents' Bill of Rights under the Long-Term Care Homes Act, 2007, homes must fully respect and promote a resident's right to receive visitors. It is expected that homes will provide for residents to see visitors in accordance with Directive #3 and ministry policy and guidance and will not place unreasonable restrictions on residents' ability to do so. Where homes believe there is a valid health and safety reason for imposing additional restrictions on general visitors beyond what is set out in Directive #3 and ministry policy and guidance, they should consult with the local public health unit.

- **QUESTION:** Do general visitors need to be fully immunized before entering the home?

ANSWER: General visitors may enter the homes regardless of their immunization status provided they have passed symptom screening and have tested negative for COVID-19 per home's testing program.

- **QUESTION:** Are social absences permitted?

ANSWER: Yes, residents who are fully immunized can leave the home for social absences, which includes absences for all reasons not listed under medical, compassionate/palliative, and/or essential absences that do not include an overnight.

- **QUESTION:** Do residents have to request approval from the home to go out for a short term (day) absence.

ANSWER: No. Residents DO NOT need to seek approval from the home to go out on a short-term absence.

- **QUESTION:** Are temporary absences permitted?

ANSWER: Yes, residents who are fully immunized may leave the home for temporary absences, which includes absences that involve two or more days and one or more nights for non-medical reasons. As per Directive 3, residents who leave the home for on an overnight absence are required to have a laboratory-based PCR COVID-19 test upon return and remain in isolation on Droplet and Contact precautions while their test result is pending.

- **QUESTION:** Do residents have to request approval from the home to go out for a temporary absence?

ANSWER: Yes, residents who are fully immunized will need to seek approval from the home to go out on temporary absences. Homes are asked to accommodate these requests wherever operationally feasible.

- **QUESTION:** Why are you only allowing fully immunized residents to go on short term and temporary absences?

ANSWER: The ministry has not mandated immunization for any residents, staff or caregivers and aims to provide all individuals, regardless of immunization status, the ability to socialize with loved ones. We are taking a cautious approach to modifying restrictions in homes based on an assessment of risk factors, including immunization status. As the pandemic continues to evolve and public health conditions improve, we anticipate making additional changes to further ease restrictions including for both vaccinated and unvaccinated residents.

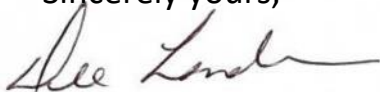
- **QUESTION:** Can residents participate in physical activity such as walks in the immediate area?

ANSWER: Yes, it is important for residents to be able to engage in physical activity and take part in activities that bring them joy, comfort, and dignity while still remaining safe. Residents who are not under isolation requirements or symptomatic can leave the home to take a walk in the immediate area to support overall physical and mental well-being even if the home is in outbreak.

Often, an effective method in communicating important information can be in using a chart, where pertinent information is seen immediately on one sheet. The government created this type of tool to support these new changes in a document called, “Visitors, Absences and Social Gatherings Snapshot.” To access this document, click here: https://www.ontarc.com/documents/MOHLTC/20210603LTCVisitor_Absences_SocialGatheringsSnapshot.pdf

These changes are positive and demonstrate a movement to unite residents and family members and friends after a very long period of separation. I look forward to communicating subsequent good news as we continue to ‘open’ up in alignment with what is happening in the broader community.

Sincerely yours,



Dee Lender
Executive Director, OARC