

October 4, 2021

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## **Mandatory Vaccines for LTC Home Employees and Volunteers, Deadline for Third Doses for Residents and Premier's Throne Speech**

Dear Residents, Long-Term Care Team Members and Supportive Partners,

For some time now, residents have been reaching out to OARC for support and assurances that the people who care for and have close interactions with them would be required to be fully vaccinated, for their own protection and for the protection of others. Residents have played their part by being amongst the first groups of Ontarians to be vaccinated, and Residents' Councils across the province have been supporting vaccine uptake efforts in their own long-term care (LTC) homes since the spring of this year.

On Friday, it was announced that Ontario would be making COVID-19 vaccinations mandatory for all team members/staff, students, volunteers and support workers by November 15<sup>th</sup>, and will not make exceptions for workers who prefer to be regularly tested for infection instead.

## **Updated Guidance Document for LTC Homes and Rapid Testing**

The Ministry of Long-Term Care (MLTC) regularly reviews and updates their Guidance Document designed to assist homes with managing all aspects of operations during the pandemic. The Guidance Document has recently been updated to reflect the new requirement of mandatory vaccination and other related topics. A Pandemic Response Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) resource has also been updated to provide further clarification and context.

See below to access the relevant Ministry documents:

- [AsDM memo](#)
- [Minister's Directive on LTC Home COVID-19 Immunization Policy](#)
- [LTC Immunization Policy Resource Guide](#)
- [Minister's Directive on COVID-19 LTCH Surveillance Testing and Access to Homes](#)
- [MLTC COVID-19 Guidance Document](#)
- [Pandemic Response FAQs](#)

## HIGHLIGHTS from Guidance Document and FAQ Document

### Q: What has changed?

**A:** The ministry has updated the Minister's Directive: Long-term care home COVID-19 immunization policy and is **now requiring all staff, students and volunteers, plus support workers, to provide proof that they have received all required doses of a COVID-19 vaccine, or proof of a valid medical contraindication, by November 15, 2021.** Individuals who choose not to show such proof by the deadline will not be permitted to enter the home to work, train or volunteer. The definition of fully immunized has been updated to reflect requirements related to vaccines that some individuals may have received out-of-country that are not approved by Health Canada. The Minister's Directive: COVID-19: Long-term care home surveillance testing and access to homes has also been updated to include the introduction of randomized rapid antigen testing for fully immunized individuals (September 28, 2021, Ministry of Long-Term Care Page 6 of 31). This change will be effective October 15th, 2021.

### Q: Are vaccines mandatory for visitors or essential caregivers?

**A:** No, general visitors and essential caregivers are not covered by the Minister's Directive: Long-Term Care Home COVID-19 Immunization Policy ([link](#)). All individuals entering the home must be actively screened and must be tested in accordance with the Minister's Directive: COVID-19: Long-term care home surveillance testing and access to homes ([link](#)). In addition, general visitors and essential caregivers must follow public health guidance, wear appropriate PPE when required and should be encouraged to maintain vigilance with practices such as hand hygiene. September 28, 2021, Ministry of Long-Term Care Page 13 of 31 Directives put forth by the ministry provide minimum requirements with which all homes must comply, and homes are permitted to increase requirements as they deem necessary for the safety of residents.

### Q: What are the testing requirements for fully immunized individuals?

**A:** As of July 16, 2021, asymptomatic, fully immunized individuals are no longer required to be tested regularly for COVID-19. However, effective October 15, 2021, licensees will be required to randomly test fully immunized individuals who enter a long-term care home to aid in the early detection of possible breakthrough cases of COVID-19. While licensees have the flexibility to determine the specific approach to be used, randomized testing (using rapid antigen tests) must be done weekly and cannot be done on the same day week over week.

## **Q: Can homes resume off-site excursions?**

**A:** Off-site excursions are permitted. All residents are permitted to take part in off-site excursions, regardless of immunization status. However, the government announced that, as of September 22, 2021, individuals will need to be fully vaccinated to access some indoor settings, such as restaurants, museums, theatres, casinos, and banquet halls, unless they have a medical exemption. This may limit the social outings of some residents who have not been vaccinated. As with any activity, residents and staff need to follow public health guidance and maintain vigilance in practices like hand hygiene, masking and physical distancing where appropriate.

*Residents' Council Discussion opportunity: Consider inviting your home's Director of Care or Infection Control lead to a future Council meeting to discuss the process residents need to follow to obtain proof of their vaccination status for outings.*

## **Target Dates for Third Vaccine Doses for Residents – October 8<sup>th</sup>, 2021**

A reminder that the Ministries of Health, Long-Term Care and Seniors and Accessibility released a [joint memo on September 17<sup>th</sup>](#), announcing a target date by which all residents of LTC homes and higher-risk licensed retirement homes would receive a third “booster” dose of the COVID-19 vaccine. The decision to offer a third dose to those considered to be at highest risk is based on the recommendation of the Chief Medical Officer of Health and health experts, in an effort to provide an extra layer of protection against the Delta variant. According to the Ministry's COVID-19 [Guidance Document for LTC homes](#), “this includes LTC homes to ensure the safety of senior populations in higher-risk congregate settings as available evidence shows **the immune response in residents wanes after several months compared to the general population.**”

## **Protecting Ontario's Progress: Speech from the Throne – October 4<sup>th</sup>, 2021**

Earlier today, the Lieutenant Governor Elizabeth Dowdeswell delivered Premier Doug Ford's throne speech. The speech highlighted the province's continued commitment to invest in the infrastructure and secure the resources necessary to provide quality care and improve experiences in the long-term care sector.

*“We owe Ontario's seniors so much; we owe them the opportunity to age and live with dignity. Your government will be there for them. Long-term care home residents are being neglected no more.” -Premier Doug Ford*

Read full speech [here](#).