

December 16, 2021

Temporary Responsive Measures in Long-Term Care Homes Announced to reduce risk and provide optimal safety and support to residents and team members (staff)

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

On Tuesday afternoon, our Ministry of Long-Term Care released a memo and several supporting documents outlining some temporary new enhanced and responsive measures for LTC home teams in light of the increasing level of risk posed by the highly transmissible Omicron variant of COVID-19.

By now, you have likely already heard some bits and pieces from this [memo](#), which was authored by Erin Hannah, Associate Deputy Minister, Long-Term Care Policy and Pandemic Response.

OARC has been actively involved in discussions with our Ministry and other stakeholders to ensure that the impact of decisions made on residents physical and emotional wellbeing is understood.

It is with a heavy heart that we circulate this new information to you. We understand that it is not easy to receive this news, as we know wholeheartedly that these measures will have a direct impact on residents and their loved ones, and understandably, leave people feeling disappointed and discouraged with Christmas nearly a week away.

We know that these measures will require some shifting of plans and will change the way you spend time with those closest to you in the coming days and weeks. Here are some of the changes that can be expected in your home.

Please be assured that these measures are indeed temporary, and the decisions behind them were not made lightly. Our Ministry partners are committed to following the guidance of the Ontario Science Table and Medical Officials and will review and reassess these measures as the situation continues to evolve. As Erin Hannah states in her memo, “Our LTC homes are part of the fabric of our communities. Higher community transmission means an increased risk for residents and staff – we must take steps now to reduce the risk of COVID-19 entering long-term care homes.”

Effective Yesterday, December 15 at 7pm:

- **ALL general visitors must be fully vaccinated i.e., receipt of two doses of vaccination** (or have a valid medical exemption) to enter long-term care homes, unless they are visiting a resident receiving end of life care.
 - Infants under 1 year of age are not considered visitors and may enter the home without being subject to surveillance testing.
 - **As children under 5 years old are unable to receive a COVID-19 vaccine, they will be unable to come into a home at this time. While children between the ages of 5-12 may have had the opportunity to receive one dose of vaccine, they are not yet eligible to receive the second dose, therefore they are not ‘fully vaccinated’ at this time.**
- **Outdoor visits can occur regardless of vaccination status** where homes have outdoor visiting spaces that support safe visits (e.g., provision of appropriate shelter, warmth and physical distancing).

Effective Tomorrow, Friday, December 17:

- All team members (staff), students, volunteers and caregivers must be surveillance **tested at least 2 times per week**. Homes may wish to go beyond this province-wide requirement based on local factors and risk management decisions.
- All general visitors and support workers must be tested each time they enter a home unless they have a negative test from the previous day.
- All currently designated caregivers must provide proof of a first dose of vaccine (or a valid medical exemption) by December 20 to enter a home, unless they are visiting a resident receiving end of life care. These caregivers will then have until February 21 to be fully vaccinated. Until fully vaccinated, these caregivers will be limited to supporting their loved one in the resident’s room.
- A maximum of 2 caregivers can be designated by a resident and any newly designated caregivers must be fully vaccinated to enter the home. If a resident currently has more than 2 designated caregivers, that does not have to change. These changes are effective immediately.
- A maximum of 2 people (caregivers and visitors) per resident at a time for indoor visits, and 4 people (caregivers and visitors) per resident at a time for outdoor visits.
- **Residents who are fully vaccinated may continue to leave the home for day absences** and must be reminded of public health safety measures to follow when they are outside of the home.
- **Social overnight absences are being suspended at this time due to the increased transmissibility of the Omicron variant.**

- Residents who wish to leave the home overnight for social purposes will need to follow the appropriate discharge process, as well as the re-admission protocol when they return at a later date.
- All residents may continue to leave the home for essential, medical or compassionate absences.
- A walk around is not considered a day absence.

How day to day life and activities might change:

- Communal dining and social activities continue to be permitted
- Large group gatherings (i.e., more than 10 people) are not permitted at this time
- Residents will stay 'cohorted' amongst peers from their respective floor/home area or unit for higher-risk activities like singing and dancing, in addition to dining.
- Fully vaccinated caregivers may continue to join residents for communal dining / family-style meals, while remaining masked at all times (caregivers cannot eat/drink with residents).

Communication in Your Home:

The OARC team encourages LTC home management and resident leaders to work together to identify the most appropriate ways to keep residents well-informed on an ongoing basis. One strategy might be to adapt OARC's [Communications Tool](#) template as one format to relay important updates (verbally or in writing) to ALL residents and their supportive partners/substitute decision makers etc. We also encourage you to print and circulate our bulletins and newsletters and print any linked attachments. The Ministry's [Key Messages](#) document might be of particular interest as it goes into more detail about the updated measures, gives specific examples, and the rationale behind the decisions. Please stay tuned as additional resources are expected to be released in the coming days.

We look forward to the time when children can be fully vaccinated, where upon reunions and family gatherings can occur again with comfort and ease.

Until then, we will work together to remain optimistic, to advocate for resident perspectives and experiences at the provincial level, and support you to keep hope in your heart. Please know that we are keeping you in ours.

Yours sincerely,



Dee Tripp (formerly Lender)
OARC Executive Director

Ministry Reference and Guidance Documents:

- [Enhanced Measure Memo](#) from the Ministry of Long-Term Care
- The Ministry has also released some additional reference and guidance documents:
[Summary of Enhanced Measures](#)
- [Key Messages to Support Residents and Families](#) (contains helpful Questions and Answers)
- [Minister's Directive on LTC COVID-19 Immunization Policy](#)
- [Minister's Directive on COVID-19 Surveillance Testing and Access to Homes](#)