
January 6, 2022

Fourth Dose of COVID-19 Vaccine and Other Updates

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

There continues to be a steady flow of information from our Ministry of Long-Term Care partners in response to the rapidly changing COVID-19 situation, both in Ontario long-term care (LTC) homes and the broader community. Of particular interest to residents is the latest commitment from our government to prioritize access to a fourth dose of COVID-19 vaccinations for residents living in congregate settings, including long-term care and retirement homes.

At this time, most LTC residents have received a third (or booster) shot of the vaccine. The latest scientific data backed by opinions expressed by Canadian medical experts suggests that a fourth dose will provide more robust protection for those at highest risk of contracting the virus and bring recipients closer to Springtime when temperatures will allow for people to enjoy the outdoors much more than during the cold winter. Virus transmission rates went down when people were free to be outdoors regularly.

A third (or booster) dose will also become mandatory for LTC team members (staff), students, volunteers, caregivers and general visitors, and they will be required to show proof of their third (or booster) dose once they are eligible (i.e., 3 months after receiving the 2nd dose).

Another significant change is now reflected in the updated guidance around COVID-19 testing and isolation requirements. In an effort to counter serious shortages in your LTC home workforce, team members who test positive for COVID-19 may be cleared to return to work sooner (by day 7) following a negative test with a PCR test on day 6 or negative test using a Rapid Antigen Test on day 6 *and* 7. Previously, the return-to-work window was 10 days.

To learn more detail about these recent changes, you may access a memo, dated December 31st, 2021, from Erin Hannah, the Associate Deputy Minister, LTC Policy and Pandemic Response [here](#).

In addition to the [Key Messages to Support Residents and Families](#) document referenced below, an information sheet containing [Key Messages for Consent of 4th Dose](#) has been prepared to help you understand the scientific evidence behind it. We encourage LTC home teams to consider printing, posting and sharing these directly with residents (and care partners) using a variety of formats to meet the range of preferences and needs at your homes.

Fourth Vaccination - Common Questions and Answers:

1. What measures are being implemented that will impact residents and families?

Answer: The province is making fourth doses available to long-term care residents; mandating third doses for all staff, students, volunteers, caregivers and support workers. The province has also updated its guidance for testing and case and contact management to prioritize capacity for high-risk settings including long-term care homes and will ensure those at highest risk of severe outcomes, and those caring for them, have timely access to test results for immediate clinical and public health management

2. Why should residents receive a fourth dose?

Answer: Older adults living in shared living settings, such as long-term care residents, are at increased risk for COVID-19 infection and severe COVID-19 disease, including hospitalization and death, because of their age and underlying medical conditions. In the context of the rapidly escalating risk posed by the highly transmissible SARS-CoV-2 variant of concern Omicron, the Ontario Immunization Advisory Committee (OIAC) reviewed unpublished Ontario data on immunogenicity after third booster doses in residents of long-term care, retirement home residents and other shared living settings. Based on their expert opinion they recommended that Ontario begin to offer a fourth dose of an mRNA vaccine to eligible residents of long-term care homes, retirement homes, Elder Care Lodges and older adults in other shared living settings providing assisted living and health services. This will provide them with an extra layer of protection against COVID-19 and its variants.

3. What scientific evidence is the decision to administer fourth doses to residents of LTC homes based on?

Answer: Evidence shows that 10 to 12 weeks after receiving the third dose of COVID-19 vaccine the immune response in older residents who live in long-term care homes wanes significantly compared to the general population. Administering a fourth dose to residents of long-term care homes, licensed retirement homes and elder care lodges, can help boost their immune response for improved protection against COVID-19.

4. When will older residents of shared living settings receive their fourth dose?

Answer: Residents of long-term care homes, licensed retirement homes and Elder Care Lodges will generally receive their fourth dose in their residence. Their fourth dose can be administered at a minimum of three months (or 84 days) following their third dose. Long-term care homes will be planning for vaccine clinics onsite over the coming weeks.

5. Does the fourth dose change the definition of who is fully vaccinated?

Answer: No, it does not. For the purposes of public health measures, individuals are still defined as fully vaccinated at 14 or more days after receiving their second dose.

6. Will consent be obtained for fourth doses?

Answer: Yes, informed consent is needed prior to receiving a fourth dose. Residents can agree to a fourth dose now and change their mind at any time before the vaccination clinic. Residents can also decide against a fourth dose now and change their mind later. This decision is completely voluntary. Residents can choose to agree or not to. A residents' decision will not affect their care at the home in any way.

January 4, 2022 – Associate Deputy Minister Pandemic Response Update for LTC Homes

Earlier this week, another memo was released with an update on the Province's Pandemic Response. Highlights included an update on the guidance around resident gatherings and other emergency supports for team members (staff) who might need access to childcare and might be called upon to work at more than one LTC home (this is now permissible for fully vaccinated staff under circumstances where there is critical need). You may access this memo [here](#).

During our OARC Resident Forums and other exchanges with residents, a few additional questions have been brought forward. The following responses have been taken from the Ministry's updated LTC COVID-19 Guidance Document which can be accessed [here](#).

Question: Can residents continue to socialize, and can essential caregivers participate?

Answer: It is important to note that residents can and should continue to socialize and gather in small groups within the home, unless under specific isolation and droplet/contact precautions. This ability to socialize and share their daily lives and experiences with each other is critical to the mental health and emotional needs of residents just like any other Ontarian who shares a home with others. Caregivers who have three vaccine doses can join small gatherings with residents.

Note: While the specific limit to social gatherings under Ontario’s Provincial Roadmap to Reopen (which stipulates five people indoors) does not apply to LTC homes, each home should determine the size of social gatherings among residents that best reflect the realities of the home from a staffing and space perspective to ensure these social opportunities are as safe as possible. Cohorting of residents continues to be necessary.

Question: Are personal care services including hairdressing still permitted in my home?

Answer: Personal care services such as hairdressing and barber services are permitted in long-term care homes in accordance with all applicable laws including regulations under the [Reopening Ontario \(A Flexible Response to COVID-19\) Act, 2020](#).

New: Please note that in homes where the personal care service provider is a general visitor and not a staff member the provider will not be able to gain entry to the home at this time. Residents should be encouraged to wear masks where possible or tolerated.

Question: My LTC home has been utilizing students to help provide my personal care – is this allowed?

Answer: Yes – In recognition of the staffing challenges that long-term care homes are experiencing the ministry has put in place several measures to help homes in times of serious staffing shortages that cannot be filled by other means including staffing agencies. Homes not in outbreak can implement these measures based on their own assessment. Measures are intended to give your LTC home operational flexibility. This includes the special provision for licensees to “fill any staff position with the person who, in their reasonable opinion, has the adequate skills, training and knowledge to perform the duties required of that position.”

Links to Supporting Documents:

- [Associate Deputy Minister LTC Pandemic Response Memo](#) – December 31, 2021
- [Associate Deputy Minister LTC Pandemic Response Update](#) – January 4, 2022
- [Summary of Enhanced Measures Slides from Webinar](#)
- [LTC COVID-19 Guidance Document](#)
- [Minister’s Directive on LTC Home COVID-19 Immunization Policy \(EN\)](#)
- [Testing and Isolation Placemat for Staff](#)
- [Key Messages to Support Residents and Families \(EN\)](#)
- [Key Messages to Support Residents and Families \(FR\)](#)

- [COVID-19 Vaccine Consent Form \(EN\)](#)
- [COVID-19 Vaccine Consent Form \(FR\)](#)
- [Key Messages for Consent of 4th Dose \(EN\)](#)
- [Key Messages for Consent of 4th Dose \(FR\)](#)
- [COVID-19 Specimen Collection and Requisition Info Sheet](#)
- [Outbreak Testing Prioritization Protocol](#)

Stay Connected with OARC's Forum for Residents

Peer connection, support and sharing is more important now than ever. Residents are welcome to join OARC Resident leaders for our Resident Forums every Thursday at 2pm.

How to get connected: Using the Zoom platform on a computer, smart phone or tablet, you can join us using this meeting link:

<https://zoom.us/j/9884879139?pwd=RjdaNmwxTzVLMmk2Wlp1QkVaQ1MxUT09>

Clicking the link should automatically launch you into the Forum waiting room, however, if you are prompted to enter any additional information, you can enter the following:

1. Meeting ID: 988 487 9139
2. Passcode: Resident

To join from a telephone:

1. Dial our toll-free phone-in option 1-888 475 4499
2. Enter our Meeting ID: 988 487 9139
3. Enter our Passcode: 93606329

RESIDENTS' COUNCILS CAN KEEP THE CONVERSATION GOING

To ensure that residents and Residents' Councils are well-informed and truly working in partnership with their LTC home teams, we encourage you to continue to meet, either in small groups, in your dining rooms, 1:1 or virtually, for Residents' Council meetings and peer connection.

Consider inviting your home's Infection Control lead as a special pre-approved guest to provide regular updates on the steps being taken to keep residents, team members (staff), caregivers etc. safe.

Additionally, consider as a Residents' Council, communicating with your LTC management team through minutes of a meeting, articulating how you are feeling, providing an invitation to creatively problem solve TOGETHER so that residents truly feel supported in

all domains (physical, emotional, social, etc.) Consider a meeting where residents and their LTC team members/management generate solutions together to challenges that residents experience and feel each day during these difficult times. Extending this thought further, perhaps a similar meeting could generate new and fresh ideas to thank, encourage and support your amazing team members.

Residents want to be part of the solution to all challenges in their home. During a time where self-determination and choice has been negatively affected and disallowed, it is imperative that we work with and engage residents in solutions as much as possible.

The OARC team would love to hear what is working in your homes! We will share your ideas with others to enhance the resident experience and home communication across the province. Keep sharing with us (send to the attention of mmcvie@ontarc.com).

We understand that this information, on top of the increased restrictions that you've been living through these last few weeks, may leave you feeling confused and further discouraged. With every dose of the vaccine, we have been hopeful that this would be the necessary step to propel us back to pre-pandemic life. To ask for your continued patience and sacrifice feels disingenuous and unfair. We are here, and we are listening, we are communicating with government, and we are staying vigilant and hopeful. We will get through this together.

Yours sincerely,



Dee Tripp (formerly Lender)
Executive Director, OARC