
October 7, 2022

Updated Long-Term Care Pandemic Response Guidance

Dear Residents and supportive partners,

Yesterday afternoon, the Ministry of Long-Term Care released a [memo](#) outlining changes to the [COVID-19 Guidance Document for Long-Term Care Homes in Ontario](#). These changes take effect next week, on October 14th.

Highlights of these changes include:

- Masks are still required for your team members and visitors/caregivers, however, **masks can be removed when you are alone in your room with a visitor/caregiver.**
 - For residents living in shared rooms, homes should seek to designate a space to enable residents to interact with their visitors without masks.
 - When not in a one-on-one setting with a resident in their room or a designated space within the home, visitors and caregivers are required to be masked.
- For long-term care team members, screening requirements will shift from active to passive screening (self-monitoring for symptoms).
- **Active screening for visitors and caregivers** continues to be recommended.
- Residents will continue to be screened daily for signs and symptoms of COVID-19. **Testing of residents upon returning from an absence is no longer required unless they have symptoms.**
- Your home can return to their own visitor policies - the **provincially set limit of 4 visitors (including caregivers) per resident at a time has been removed.**
- Physical distancing continues to be encouraged and residents continue to be urged to avoid situations like crowded places where COVID-19 can spread more easily.

Bulletin links for your reference:

[Assistant Deputy Minister, Long-Term Care Operations Memo](#)

[Ministry of Long-Term Care Guidance Document](#)

[Ministry of Health COVID-19 Guidance: Long-Term Care Homes, Retirement Homes, and Other Congregate Settings for Public Health Units](#)

[Pandemic Response FAQ](#)

[What Residents Can Expect](#)

Updated Resource for Residents

Of particular interest to residents is the updated [What Residents Can Expect](#) document. We encourage you to make this resource accessible to all residents in your home by posting, printing, and circulating hardcopies wherever possible.

Resident Leaders may consider holding a discussion group with a guest from their LTC home leadership team or IPAC lead, and/or incorporating these significant updates into your next Residents' Council meeting agenda to help keep resident peers well-informed.

COVID-19 Policies: What Residents Can Expect in a Long-Term Care Home
(As of October 14, 2022)

All residents may*...

- Spend time with visitors and caregivers without wearing masks in your room (if you are not sharing a room) or in a space designated by the home
- Enjoy the company of visitors, indoors or outdoors, consistent with your home's visitor and/or vaccination policies
- Participate in group social activities, including games, clubs and exercises
- Have meals in the dining room, including buffet and family-style meals
- Leave the home for all types of absences, including social day and overnight absences, and not have to test or quarantine upon return to the home**

*Unless otherwise directed by the local public health unit, during outbreaks in the home or when isolating
**Unless you do not pose a concern, such as having symptoms of COVID-19

What measures are in place to safeguard long-term care homes?

- Everyone must screen for symptoms of or exposure to COVID-19*
- Individuals visiting or working indoors must also be tested.
- All staff, students, support workers and volunteers are required to wear masks and applicable personal protective equipment when interacting with residents.
- All caregivers and general visitors are required to wear a mask when in common or shared spaces of the home, and are recommended to wear a mask in a resident's room.
- Infection prevention and control measures continue to be followed, including physical distancing, hand washing and enhanced cleaning.

*Individual homes may have their own additional policies for screening and testing requirements

What if the home is in outbreak?

Residents can expect the following if the area of the home they live in is in outbreak*:

- Group activities, dining and social gatherings may continue in non-outbreak areas if residents can follow public health measures.
- For outbreak areas of a home, residents will be cohorted in small groups for all essential activities. Group activities for cohorts may continue/resume if operationally feasible.
- Communal dining, non-essential activities and personal care services may be suspended or modified.
- Caregivers can still visit.

*Unless otherwise directed by the local public health unit

COVID-19 Safety Measures for Absences
(As of October 14, 2022)

Whenever outside of the home, residents should do their best to:

- Wear a mask (as tolerated)
- Wash hands frequently
- Consider maintaining physical distancing and avoid large gatherings with crowding

What happens when I return home?

When residents return from a day or overnight absence they will:

- Be screened for symptoms of or exposure to COVID-19
- Only need to test and isolate if they have symptoms of COVID-19

What if I come into contact with someone with COVID-19?

Residents regardless of COVID-19 vaccination status:

- Monitor for symptoms, but no longer need to isolate unless they develop symptoms or their roommate has COVID-19
- For residents whose roommate has COVID-19, they must isolate until a negative result is obtained from the day five PCR test. Residents with symptoms or who test positive for COVID-19 must isolate for 10 days
- All residents are still permitted to see their caregivers while in isolation

Pandemic Response: Frequently Asked Questions

We are pleased to see emphasis being placed on resident well-being in the updated guidance. The need to balance risk while prioritizing health and resident quality of life is reflected through several responses captured in the updated [Pandemic Response Frequently Asked Questions Document](#). We've pulled out some highlights below that residents might like to know about.

Can long-term care homes have their own policies that go above and beyond the requirements set out by the ministry?

While long-term care homes may go above and beyond requirements that are set out by the Ministry of Long-Term Care (unless otherwise noted in the directive or guidance document), they must do so with careful consideration of the Fixing Long-Term Care Act, 2021 and the Residents' Bill of Rights. We strongly encourage LTC homes to consult with their legal counsel, Residents' Council and Family Council, as well as the public health unit, when implementing a policy that goes beyond provincial requirements. **In addition, recognizing the toll that isolation has on the well-being of residents, homes are expected to follow the isolation requirements in the updated guidance, and to not go beyond these requirements unless advised to do so by their local public health unit.**

Do residents have to test upon returning from an absence?

Upon return from an absence, residents are to be screened for signs and symptoms of COVID-19 but are not required to be tested or isolated unless they have symptoms or have tested positive for COVID-19.

Can visitors and essential caregivers join residents for a meal and for social gatherings?

Caregivers and general visitors may accompany a resident for meals or social gatherings. When caregivers or visitors are joining a resident in a communal dining setting or social gathering, they are required to remain masked for the duration of the meal.

However, recognizing that long-term care residents miss seeing the faces of their loved ones, it is recommended rather than required that caregivers and visitors wear masks when they are alone with a resident in their room.

For residents living in shared rooms, homes should seek to designate a space to enable residents who would like to interact with their visitors without masks. When not in a one-on-one setting with a resident in their room or a designated space within the home, visitors and caregivers are required to be masked.

What are the indoor and outdoor gathering allowances for long-term care home residents?

Long-term care home operators are responsible for setting their own visitor policy and may restrict the number of visitors per resident based on available space and applicable guidance and laws. However, there are no provincially set limits on the number of individuals permitted to visit for indoor or outdoor gatherings.

If a resident is in isolation or is symptomatic, or if the resident resides in a declared outbreak area, then the resident may only have one caregiver visit at a time. In cases where a resident is receiving end of life care, there are no restrictions of number of visitors permitted.

Can homes implement their own vaccination policies?

Long-term care licensees retain the ability to impose vaccination requirements for existing and new staff, students, and volunteers, provided they comply with all applicable laws, such as the Human Rights Code. In addition, nothing prevents licensees from having proof-of-vaccination requirements for caregivers, general visitors and support workers provided the licensee's requirements are consistent with the Fixing Long-Term Care Act, 2021, including the Residents' Bill of Rights and section 5 of the Act (right to a safe and secure home), and O. Reg. 246/22: General, and comply with all other applicable laws including the Human Rights Code. **However, vaccination requirements shall not apply to residents. For clarity, homes can not deny admission of a resident due to their vaccination status.**

Any licensee who developed vaccine requirements would be responsible for updating the policies and reviewing them going forward (for example, requiring existing and/or new staff be up to date with all recommended COVID-19 doses). For more information on recommended doses of COVID-19 vaccine, please review the Ministry of Health's COVID-19 Vaccine Guidance.

While licensees have the ability to develop their own proof-of-vaccination policies, to ensure that residents are not unreasonably restricted from having visitors in accordance with the Residents' Bill of Rights, vaccination policies must not apply to outdoor visitors nor to visitors under the age of 5. **Licensees should engage with their Residents' Council, Family Council and local public health unit to inform their policies and should seek independent legal advice as needed regarding their ongoing policies.**

Ministry of Health Guidance Updates

The Ministry of Health has released an updated [COVID-19 Guidance: Long-Term Care Homes, Retirement Homes and Other Congregate Living Settings for Public Health Units](#) which contains some key changes that will affect how outbreaks are defined and how incidents where people have had a 'close contact' with a COVID-19 positive person will be handled moving forward. These include:

- Residents who are close contacts of a person with COVID-19 are no longer required to isolate, unless they have symptoms or they are a roommate of the person with COVID-19.
- Testing of asymptomatic residents being admitted or transferred from the community or a facility that is not in outbreak is no longer recommended.
- Workers who are close contacts of individuals with COVID-19 symptoms or a positive test are able to return to work without isolating, provided they have no symptoms and follow appropriate precautions.
- The definition of a confirmed outbreak has been updated to two or more residents with COVID-19 with a common link within a 10-day period (**no longer includes staff or visitors in the definition**).

Upcoming Pandemic Response Update Webinars

The Ministry is hosting 2 webinars next week to provide an overview of the changes to long-term care homes. Both webinars will consist of the same content/messaging. While intended for an audience of Long-Term Care teams/licensees, the subject matter may be of interest to residents and Residents' Council supporters.

Webinar Dates:

Tuesday, October 11th at 12:00-1:00pm – [Click here to join](#).

Wednesday, October 12th at 12:00-1:00pm – [Click here to join](#).