
November 7, 2023

Masking Guidance Update for Long-Term Care Homes

Dear Residents and Residents' Council Supporters,

Effective today, long-term care homes will follow enhanced masking guidance from the Ministry of Long-Term Care. These measures include:

- Mandatory masking for team members (staff), students, support workers and volunteers.
- Strongly encouraging essential caregivers and visitors to wear masks in resident areas indoors, except for when visiting privately in a resident's room* or enjoying a meal or snack together in communal spaces.

Enhanced masking requirements will be reassessed once COVID-19 and respiratory virus activity has declined.

Access the Updated Guidance Documents below:

- Assistant Deputy Minister (ADM) Memo – [English](#) | [French](#)
- COVID-19 Guidance Document for LTC Homes in Ontario [English](#) | [French](#)

*If a resident in a shared room is uncomfortable with others removing their mask, homes are encouraged to designate a space to enable the roommate to have visitors without masking.

OARC Reflections

Residents have already shared with us a wide range of reactions to the news of these enhanced measures. Some residents view the measures as a necessary, temporary step to promote safety in their homes, while others, are feeling frustrated and discouraged, with the return of mandatory masking feeling like a step further away from experiencing what normal life in LTC could be. Some are experiencing a mix of both reactions.

First and foremost, we want to acknowledge and validate this range of emotions. OARC is here to listen and learn from you, including how you are experiencing these changes in your homes. We continue to advocate for proactive, transparent communication and engagement with residents at every level – from the government and policy-making levels, to regional and organizational levels, and at

the LTC home-level. We also advocate for residents to have the same rights and opportunities for self-determination as members of the broader community. We have spoken at length about the impact of isolation on resident mental health and well-being and have worked with residents to elevate specific incidences when their homes have layered on additional restrictions above and beyond the guidance of Public Health and the Ministry.

When meeting with Ministry partners concerning the possibility of enhanced masking requirements, OARC advocated for residents to continue to have the opportunity to share time, space and a snack or meal in common areas with their families and visitors. We are pleased to see this request reflected in the memo (and supporting documentation) released by the Assistant Deputy Minister of LTC.

Many lessons have been learned from the trauma of isolation and loneliness experienced through the COVID-19 pandemic, so we must move forward with a commitment to embracing and promoting overall wellness. It's about a safe, yet balanced approach always, and acknowledging that the season ahead of us is for many, the most special time of the year. As one of OARC's Resident Leaders shared, **“we must learn to live *with* COVID-19 – not stop living or enjoying our lives because of it.”**

What Can Residents' Councils Do?

Residents' Councils are the barometer of excellent communication and quality of living in LTC homes. As we approach the festive season, acknowledging the heightened risk of respiratory illness, we encourage regular, proactive and creative communication between Councils and home management teams so that health and well-being (including participation in festive events and celebrations) are all considered in partnership.

Consider the following opportunities to build relationships and support a mutual understanding of how outbreaks are managed in your home:

- Discuss resident communication preferences at a future Residents' Council meeting and explore how [OARC's tools](#) might be adapted to work for you.
- Develop a strategy for your Council to stay connected using [adapted meeting formats](#) during periods of extended outbreak (capture these in your Bylaws!)
- Invite your Administrator/Executive Director to attend a Residents' Council meeting to discuss your home's Emergency plan (which includes outbreaks).
- Get to know your home's Infection Prevention and Control (IPAC) Lead.
 - Councils may extend an invitation to attend a future Council meeting.
 - Give residents an opportunity to ask questions and learn about outbreak management and the availability/distribution of vaccines.
 - Share and discuss guidance coming from your local Public Health Unit and the Ministry of Long-Term Care.