

Ministry of Long-Term Care

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November 2, 2023

MEMORANDUM TO: Long-Term Care Home Licensees

FROM: Kelly McAslan
Assistant Deputy Minister, Long-Term Care Operations Division

SUBJECT: **Enhanced Masking in Long-Term Care Homes**

Further to the memo dated October 6, 2023 on readiness for the respiratory illness season, I am writing to advise you of changes to enhance masking to optimize health and safety in long-term care homes (LTCHs) while balancing the impact on resident and staff well-being.

Recent trends have shown a moderate to high level of community transmission of COVID-19 and an increase in COVID-19 outbreaks in LTCHs, with an increased risk of hospitalization amongst residents. It is projected that COVID-19 activity may peak in the next few weeks, around the same time it is anticipated that influenza and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) will rise.

Based on the advice of the Chief Medical Officer of Health, the following **enhanced masking measures for non-outbreak** situations are being put into effect in LTCHs:

- Requiring staff, students, support workers, and volunteers to wear a mask when in resident areas indoors, and
- Strongly recommending visitors and caregivers to wear a mask in resident areas indoors except when with the resident in the resident's room or when eating or drinking with a resident in communal spaces. 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.

LTCHs are expected to implement these enhanced masking changes as soon as possible and **no later than November 7, 2023**. The Ministry of Long-Term Care's COVID-19 guidance document for long-term care homes (attached) has been updated to reflect the new changes to enhanced masking requirements.

Enhanced masking requirements will be reassessed once the current COVID-19 wave and other respiratory virus activity have declined.

These changes align with masking policies put in place for this respiratory illness season in Ontario hospitals and other health care settings, and are an important part of the multiple layers of protection for LTCHs including:

- Ensure eligible residents are offered **COVID-19, influenza and RSV vaccines**, as immunization is the best way to prevent severe outcomes from these infections, including hospitalization and death.
 - Homes are to work with their local public health units to receive their vaccine supply and are strongly encouraged to independently administer vaccines.
 - Homes are encouraged to include staff and caregivers when planning vaccine clinics for residents.
 - If homes are experiencing challenges in accessing vaccine supply, please contact the ministry at ltc.info@ontario.ca.
- Ensure ready access to **therapeutics (antiviral treatments)** for COVID-19 and influenza such as Paxlovid (or Remdesivir) and Tamiflu (or Relenza) and to pre-assess residents for eligibility for antivirals in advance.
- Self-monitoring for symptoms (i.e., passive screening) and **staying home when sick**.
- Ensure that staff are able to conduct a point-of-care risk assessment before each resident encounter and wear appropriate **personal protective equipment (PPE)**
- Ensure you have adequate PPE supplies.
- Conduct quarterly **IPAC audits**.

It continues to be essential to be working with your local public health unit on **outbreak management**, including universal masking during outbreaks, cohorting, isolation of cases, etc., as recommended in the Ministry of Health's [COVID-19 Guidance for Public Health Units: Long-Term Care Homes, Retirement Homes, and Other Congregate Living Settings](#).

In addition, please continue to immediately report all COVID-19 confirmed outbreaks to the Ministry of Long-Term Care using the Critical Incident System during regular hours or calling [1-888-999-3973](tel:1-888-999-3973) after hours and on weekends.

Thank you for your continued commitment to ensuring the health and safety of residents, staff and caregivers. If you have any questions, please contact ltc.info@ontario.ca.

Sincerely,



Kelly McAslan
Assistant Deputy Minister
Long-Term Care Operations Division
Ministry of Long-Term Care

Attachments (1): COVID-19 Guidance Document for Long-Term Care Homes in Ontario

c: Melissa Thomson, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Long-Term Care (MLTC)
Dr. Catherine Zahn, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Health (MOH)
Dr. Kieran Moore, Chief Medical Officer of Health
Dr. Barbara Yaffe, Associate Chief Medical Officer of Health
Elizabeth Walker, Executive Lead, Office of Chief Medical Officer of Health, MOH
Lisa Levin, Chief Executive Officer, AdvantAge Ontario
Donna Duncan, Chief Executive Officer, Ontario Long Term Care Association
Lindsey Jones, Association of Municipalities of Ontario
Michael Jacek, Association of Municipalities of Ontario
Michael Sherar, President and CEO, Public Health Ontario
Matthew Anderson, President and CEO, Ontario Health
Cynthia Martineau, CEO, Home and Community Care Support Services
Dee Tripp, Executive Director, Ontario Association of Residents' Councils
Samantha Peck, Executive Director, Family Councils Ontario