

Ministry of Long-Term Care

Office of the Associate Deputy
Minister, Long-Term Care Policy
and Pandemic Response

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Ministère des Soins de longue durée

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December 9, 2021

MEMORANDUM TO: All Long-Term Care Home Licensees

FROM: Erin Hannah
Associate Deputy Minister
LTC Policy and Pandemic Response

SUBJECT: Update - LTC Pandemic Response

As we approach the end of this calendar year, I would like to firstly thank you for your continued dedication and efforts to keeping home operations running smoothly and for caring for and supporting residents and their loved ones.

Across Ontario, while the number of COVID-19 cases is rising, the rate of hospitalization remains low overall and vaccination rates also continue to rise.

However, there are areas of the province that are experiencing rapid increases. Dr. Moore, Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health (CMOH), continues to actively monitor the situation, including the Omicron variant of concern (VOC), and is working closely with the local public health units to prevent and control transmission of COVID-19.

Today, I am writing to provide you with a few updates, subject to any different direction from your local public health unit:

1. New COVID-19 Variant of Concern (Omicron) and Screening

The Ministry continues to work closely with Dr. Moore and his team to actively monitor the evolving situation regarding the new COVID-19 VOC (Omicron).

Anyone who is required to quarantine by the Government of Canada, is not permitted to enter a long-term care home until released from quarantine. This requirement also applies to individuals in the same household as the person required to quarantine.

Residents who travel outside of Canada and therefore do not pass the screening requirements upon return to the home must be permitted entry, as per Directive 3,

and isolated on [Droplet and Contact Precautions](#) and tested for COVID-19 as per the [COVID-19: Provincial Testing Requirements Update](#).

The Ministry of Health is updating the COVID-19 Screening Tool for Long-Term Care Homes and Retirement Homes to reflect these requirements.

Based on the advice of the CMOH, individuals who have travelled outside of Canada (including the US) and countries covered by the federal government quarantine within the last 14 days must undergo rapid antigen testing prior to entering a long-term care home, regardless of their vaccination status. Each test is valid for 48 hours. The Minister's Directive on surveillance testing is being updated to reflect this additional requirement **effective December 10th**, however, it is recommended that homes strive to implement these changes as soon as possible.

As we continue to closely monitor the impacts of the Omicron VOC, as well as increases in cases overall, additional testing and / or other measures may be needed to ensure that we are preventing COVID-19 from entering and spreading within our long-term care homes. We will strive to provide you and your teams as much notice as possible should the situation evolve.

The updated Minister's Directive will be released shortly and shared with homes via LTCHomes.net.

2. Celebrating the 2021 holiday season

Ontario's long-term care homes are positioned to have a holiday season that looks significantly different than last year. In consultation with Dr. Moore, I am pleased to communicate to all licensees that their homes can and should strive to hold celebrations and holiday services/events that are as normal as possible.

Homes are strongly encouraged to find ways to include residents in planning and preparing for holiday celebrations including sharing traditional recipes, making decorations, helping to organize events, etc.

Homes should also ensure they are following all applicable requirements in the LTC COVID-19 Guidance Document and applicable Directives when celebrating the holidays.

In the spirit of the holiday season, we encourage you and your teams to keep the following in mind:

- Homes can put up decorations throughout the home such as paper-based decorations and tinsel and put out ceremonial objects. Trees and other decorative foliage can be brought into homes.
- Gifts and care packages from family and friends are encouraged. Packages do not need to be cleaned and disinfected or held in storage before being distributed, as the risk of spreading COVID-19 through handling packages is low.

- Celebrating the holidays with food is important for many people and is encouraged.
- Attending/practicing religious services, rites or ceremonies is an important part of the holiday season for many residents and should be encouraged/accommodated as much as possible.
- We strongly encourage you and your teams approach staff holiday events with a cautionary lens, keeping in mind the current public health advice, your local community conditions, and vigilance with all public health measures.

We recognize that the holiday season is already underway and that many celebrations have taken place and apologize for not sharing the above guidance sooner.

On behalf of everyone at the ministry, I would like to offer once again our sincerest gratitude to all of you, your staff, volunteers, visitors, and student placements as well as homes' residents, Residents' Councils, and Family Councils. It is the steadfast commitment and hard work of all these individuals and groups, under very difficult circumstances, that has advanced the sector closer to a sense of normalcy in the 2021 holiday season.

As always, should you have questions, you may contact us at MLTCPandemicResponse@ontario.ca.

Sincerely,

Original signed by

Erin Hannah
Associate Deputy Minister
LTC Policy and Pandemic Response

- c: Nancy Matthews, 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
Matthew Anderson, President and Chief Executive Officer, Ontario Health
Alison Blair, Associate Deputy Minister, Pandemic Response and Recovery Division, Ministry of Health (MOH)
Melissa Thomson, Assistant Deputy Minister, MOH
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Lisa Levin, Chief Executive Officer, AdvantAge Ontario
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Monika Turner, Association of Municipalities of Ontario
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Colleen Geiger, President and CEO (Acting), Public Health Ontario
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