

July 14, 2021

MEMO TO: Long-Term Care Home Licensees

FROM: Erin Hannah
Associate Deputy Minister

SUBJECT: Amendments to the *Minister's Directive: COVID-19: Long-Term Care Home Surveillance Testing and Access to Homes* and additional updates

With thanks to your hard work and dedication, we continue to see improvements in vaccination rates in homes and decreased incidence of outbreaks. While the progress you have made has been remarkable, based on other jurisdictions' experience, there is a need to continue to be vigilant regarding COVID-19, especially with respect to variants of concern (e.g. the Delta variant).

To this end, we continue to take a phased and cautious approach to making sector-specific changes to guidance/policies and directives that apply to long-term care homes. As the province continues to make steady progress on its [Roadmap to Reopen](#), today, I am writing to inform you of such new changes affecting long-term care homes.

Updates to the Surveillance Testing Directive

The *Minister's Directive: COVID-19: Long-Term Care Home Surveillance Testing and Access to Homes* has been updated. Effective July 16, when the province enters Step 3 of the Roadmap to Reopen, individuals who are fully immunized will no longer be subject to surveillance testing requirements when attending a long-term care home. If an individual chooses not to disclose their vaccination status, then the testing requirements remain as set out in the Minister's Directive.

In line with the Roadmap to Reopen, the minimum frequency of rapid antigen testing in [the MOH Rapid Antigen guidance document](#) is 1-2 times/week in Step 3.

A reminder that the Minister's Directive on surveillance testing does not apply to inspectors, rather inspectors from the Ministry of Long-Term Care and the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development have separate and specific testing protocols that have been established within their ministries, which now include an exemption for fully immunized individuals from asymptomatic surveillance testing. Inspectors are not required to provide proof of immunization to the long-term care home in order to enter the home.

Step 3 for Long-Term Care Homes

As a reminder and as described in the memo from June 29, 2021, the following changes also take effect on July 16:

- Returning to homes setting their own maximums for visitors based on operational capabilities with potential guidance on minimums.
- Permitting buffet and family style dining.
- Allowing activities such as karaoke, singing, and dancing.
- Permitting all residents to go on day and overnight absences regardless of immunization status.
- Enabling the resumption of off-site group excursions for residents.
- Removing requirements/rules contingent on homes' immunization coverage rates.

The updated *COVID-19 guidance document for long-term care homes* in Ontario will be available online shortly.

Directive #3

In addition to the updated *COVID-19 guidance document for long-term care homes in Ontario*, Directive #3 is also being updated. Notable changes for residents, staff, caregivers and visitors include:

- Updating the definition of “fully immunized” to reflect the allowance for receiving different COVID-19 vaccines for first and second doses.
- Changing daily symptom screening of residents to at minimum once daily (compared with twice daily).
- Adjusting the eye protection requirements for all staff and essential visitors providing care within 2 metres to a resident who is on Droplet/Contact Precautions and/or directly in an outbreak setting. Otherwise, the use of eye protection will now be based on Point of Care Risk Assessment.
- Updating the testing and isolation requirements for new admissions and transfers into the home to follow the [Ministry of Health's COVID-19 Guidance: Long-Term Care Homes and Retirement Homes for Public Health Units](#). An updated version, which will be released shortly, will remove the requirement of asymptomatic testing for residents who are fully immunized.

In our continued effort to streamline documents, the definitions related to absences and the exceptions to physical distancing and masking requirements have moved from Directive #3 to the *COVID-19 guidance document for long-term care homes in Ontario*.

These changes will also come into effect at long-term care homes on July 16. We are confident that you will be ready to go on that day. The updated Directive #3 will be available online shortly.

Active Screening Requirements

The Ministry of Health's [COVID-19 Screening Tool for Long-Term Care Homes and Retirement Homes](#) is also being updated to reflect changes to the federal quarantine requirements for travelers entering Canada.

This screening tool can be adapted based on need and the specific setting but must include the minimum screening questions set out in the document.

Regulations Governing the Roadmap of Reopen

On July 7, the regulation that governs Step 2 of the Roadmap to Reopen – [Ontario Regulation 263/20](#) made under the *Reopening Ontario (A Flexible Response to COVID-19) Act, 2020* (ROA) – was amended.

The regulatory amendment clarifies that where directives, policies, or guidance are issued by the Chief Medical Officer of Health, the Minister of Long-Term Care, or the Ministry of Long-Term Care that apply to long-term care homes, the directives, policies, or guidance apply despite anything in Ontario Regulation 263/20. This is not a change; rather it provides absolute clarity for all parties.

The services and supports you provide to residents and their families each and every day are critical – the new regulatory amendment under ROA acknowledges the unique needs of the sector and residents and ensures there is clear direction regarding which rules/requirements do and do not apply to the sector.

Thank you for your flexibility and willingness to quickly adapt during the rapidly changing and dynamic path to recovery. It is with your support and hard work that we continue to see the benefits of the easing of restrictions in long-term care homes, with a view to re-establishing a sense of normalcy for residents and all others who work, visit, and otherwise attend long-term care homes.

As always, we are available to you directly should you have any questions related to the pandemic. The team can be reached by emailing MLTCPandemicResponse@ontario.ca.

Sincerely,

original signed by

Erin Hannah

Attachments:

- Minister's Directive: COVID-19: Long-Term Care Home Surveillance Testing and Access to Homes (updated)
- COVID-19 guidance document for long-term care homes in Ontario
- Long-Term Care Visitor, Absences & Social Gatherings Snapshot
- Updated MLTC Pandemic Response FAQs

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