

Ministry of Health

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**Ministry of Long-Term Care**

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Ministère des Soins de longue durée

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January 14, 2021

Dear Directors of Care, Medical Directors, and all Long-Term Care Homes,

We recognize this time is very busy, and we thank you for all that you have been doing to protect your staff and residents. Continuing to implement and emphasize the importance of all our existing public health measures for preventing spread of COVID-19 (universal masking, maintaining physical distance, hand hygiene, screening etc.) is essential to the ongoing protection of the people who live and work in our homes. We now have the good fortune of adding another measure, vaccination. However, we understand that vaccine hesitancy may be a concern in some settings. Here are some tips and strategies to help promote vaccine uptake among staff, volunteers, students and caregivers in your homes:

- 1) Hesitancy is normal
 - a) In most circumstances, concerns can be addressed if people have a chance to feel heard and validated first, and then provided with the facts.
- 2) Trust is key
 - a) Identify "peer" champions that can help educate and encourage peers to get vaccinated. Hold small huddles with peer groups led by the champion for that group.
- 3) Role modelling and positive associations can be helpful
 - a) Every person on the team who is immunized could be encouraged to share their story and image. Consider creating buttons, stickers or other wearable items that allow staff, volunteers, and caregivers to demonstrate that they have been vaccinated, and share information about how many people are agreeing to vaccination leading up to the vaccination day(s) to show how much protection is being achieved.
- 4) Logistics matter
 - a) Having the vaccine available in the LTC home eliminates the need to travel to hospitals. But it is still wise to organize a staggered schedule for staff to ensure that at any one time only a limited number of staff could be affected by side effects that could cause them to miss work.
 - b) If staff are being vaccinated outside of usual working hours, it is strongly recommended that they be paid for their time and transportation to ensure that finances are not a barrier to immunization. LTC homes can use Prevention

and Containment funding to cover these costs.

- c) LTC homes are required to conduct surveillance testing in accordance with the Minister's Directive: COVID-19: LONG-TERM CARE HOME SURVEILLANCE TESTING AND ACCESS TO HOMES and are encouraged to voluntarily adopt the rapid antigen screening test program (using a nasal swab) as soon as possible to make it simpler and faster to identify potential positive cases. Ideally surveillance testing should be conducted within two days prior to vaccine receipt. If mild non-respiratory symptoms occur within 48 hours after vaccination, recent negative test results will be helpful for reassuring that these symptoms are due to vaccination rather than a new COVID-19 infection.
- 5) Provide education
- a) Hold town hall sessions with staff, volunteers, caregivers, residents, substitute decision-makers and family members to teach them about the development of vaccines, clinical trials, and safety protocols. Try to hold multiple educational sessions over the next couple weeks and consider recording the session and sending out the link to ensure that all staff, volunteers and caregivers can participate. Generic material that you can adapt for your home(s) are attached and will be posted shortly.

Yours truly,

(Original Signed By)

David C. Williams, MD, MHSc, FRCPC
Chief Medical Officer of Health

Richard Steele
Deputy Minister
Ministry of Long-Term Care

cc: Helen Angus, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Health
Matthew Anderson, President and CEO, Ontario Health
Dr. Barbara Yaffe, Associate Chief Medical Officer of Health
Alison Blair, Associate Deputy Minister, Pandemic Response and Recovery Division
Erin Hannah, Associate Deputy Minister, Pandemic Response
Michael Hillmer, Assistant Deputy Minister, Capacity Planning and Analytics Division
Janice Crawford, Director, Legal Services Branch
Donna Duncan, CEO, Ontario Long-Term Care Home Association
Brent Gingerich, Chair, Board of Directors, Ontario Long-Term Care Home Association
Lisa Levin, CEO, AdvantAge Ontario
Jane Sinclair, Chair, Board of Directors, AdvantAge Ontario
Brian Pollard, Assistant Deputy Minister, Long-Term Care Capital Development Division
Sheila Bristo, Assistant Deputy Minister, Long-Term Care Operations Division
Janet Hope, Assistant Deputy Minister, Long-Term Care Policy Division

Attachments: COVID-19 Vaccine Factsheet
COVID-19 Vaccine - Presentation Deck