

January 6, 2022

MEMORANDUM TO: All Retirement Home Licensees

FROM: Jacqueline Cureton
Assistant Deputy Minister
Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility

SUBJECT: Fourth Dose of mRNA Vaccine for Retirement Homes

As you are all aware, Ontario is seeing a rising number of COVID cases with the rapid spread of the Omicron COVID-19 variant. I would like to begin by expressing my sincerest gratitude to you and your teams who continue to do everything possible to support the health and safety of residents. We recognize that the Omicron-driven wave of the COVID-19 pandemic is presenting different challenges in our retirement home communities. I am writing today to provide information on the fourth dose of mRNA vaccines for retirement homes.

Provision of Fourth Doses to Retirement Homes

There continues to be an increased risk for COVID-19 infection and severe disease in the elderly population due to age and underlying medical conditions, particularly in shared living spaces like retirement homes. Based on recommendations from the Ontario Immunization Advisory Committee, effective immediately, residents of long-term care homes, retirement homes, Elder Care Lodges and older adults living in other congregate settings, will be eligible for a fourth dose of an mRNA vaccine if at least three months have passed since their third dose. Based on when residents received their third dose, many retirement home residents are now around three months from their third dose and are likely becoming increasingly more susceptible to COVID-19 infection due to waning immunity.

Any mRNA vaccine product is acceptable as a fourth dose, although data suggest that the Moderna Spikevax COVID-19 vaccine may provide a more robust immune response. We are asking retirement home administrators to do everything they can to encourage and help residents receive their fourth dose.

Independent Administration - Fourth Doses for Residents

As there is great strain on the capacity of local public health units (PHUs) and to avoid a potential lengthy delay in residents receiving fourth doses, independent administration by homes remains the preferred approach to ensure vaccines can get to residents. Homes that are set up for independent administration of COVID-19 vaccines should continue to work with their local PHUs to request vaccine and relevant vaccine ancillary supplies for administering fourth doses to residents as well as first, second, and third doses to staff, volunteers, and caregivers.

We are encouraging homes that have the capacity but are not yet set-up for independent administration to contact their local PHU. The Ministry of Health also offers weekly COVax online training sessions. For more information, please contact: RHInquiries@ontario.ca.

For homes that are unable to independently administer the vaccine please consider other avenues for on-site vaccination, **in collaboration with the local PHU**, such as:

- Organizing fourth dose vaccinations with retirement homes that are part of the same franchise and/or management.
- Contacting neighbouring retirement homes with capacity for help in administering fourth dose vaccinations.
- Working with a local pharmacist to arrange for on-site vaccinations.
- Working with your local PHU to arrange for a mobile vaccination clinic.

If your retirement home is in a position to help other retirement homes administer a fourth dose vaccination and would like to do so, please contact the Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility at: RHInquiries@ontario.ca.

In addition, retirement homes should continue to strongly encourage staff and caregivers to leverage resources available in the community to get their third dose as soon as they are eligible. Retirement homes should also use this opportunity to offer their third doses to their staff, volunteers, and essential caregivers. Staff, volunteers, and caregivers can also book booster appointments on the provincial [COVID-19 vaccination portal](#), by calling the Provincial Vaccine Contact Centre at 1-833-943-3900, or through [select pharmacies](#) and primary care settings.

The ongoing dedication, vigilance and resilience of you and your teams during this challenging time is critical and greatly appreciated as we work together to optimize safety in retirement homes, for residents, their families, and staff.

Sincerely,

Original Signed By

Jacqueline Cureton
Assistant Deputy Minister
Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility

c: Carlene Alexander, Deputy Minister, Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility
Dr. Kieran Moore, Chief Medical Officer of Health of Ontario
Dr. Barbara Yaffe, Associate Chief Medical Officer of Health
Jay O'Neill, Chief Executive Officer and Registrar, Retirement Homes Regulatory Authority (RHRA)
Cathy Hecimovich, Chief Executive Officer, Ontario Retirement Communities Association (ORCA)