

February 7, 2021

MEMORANDUM TO: Retirement Homes

FROM: Jacqueline Cureton
Assistant Deputy Minister
Seniors and Accessibility Programs, Policy and Strategy
Partnerships
Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility

SUBJECT: First Phase of De-escalation Measures in Retirement Homes

In light of the provincial plan to cautiously and gradually lift public health measures as of January 31, 2022, I am writing to update you on some changes that will begin to ease current enhanced measures in the retirement home sector effective **February 7, 2022**.

General Visitors

General Visitors will continue to be permitted, with safety measures implemented by the retirement home, unless advised by the local public health unit (PHU) to stop General Visitors.

- General visitors **will no longer be limited to designated areas** in the retirement home and will be able to visit a resident in their suite as long as the space allows for physical distancing.
- Retirement homes should continue to strongly encourage access to the home to only General Visitors who are fully vaccinated and should continue to encourage outdoor visits as much as possible.

Absences

Short term (Day) Absences

- Short term absences in retirement homes **will no longer be limited to essential outings** and are permitted regardless of the reason for the outing.
- All residents, regardless of vaccination status, are required to undergo a **Rapid Antigen Test (RAT) upon return**. Residents who go on short term absences on a daily basis or frequent basis are required to perform 2 RATs per week at least 24hrs apart (e.g., every Monday and Thursday of the week). No isolation is required unless the resident receives a positive test result.
- Residents will be required to continue to follow public health measures during the absence and will be screened upon return.

Temporary (Overnight) Absences

- Temporary absences in retirement homes **will no longer be limited to essential outings** and are permitted regardless of reasoning.
- All residents, regardless of vaccination status, are required to perform **a RAT and a PCR test on day 5 after the day they return**. No isolation is required unless the resident receives a positive test result. If a timely PCR test is not available, on day 5 of return 2 RATs 24 hours apart may be used as an alternative.
- Residents will be required to continue following public health measures during the absence and will be screened upon return.

Requirements for Admissions and Transfers

- In alignment with the *Ministry of Health's Long-Term Care Home and Retirement Home Guidance for Public Health Units* released on February 3, admissions and transfers to an **outbreak floor/unit of the receiving home** should be avoided if:
 - There is a newly declared outbreak where there is an ongoing investigation;
 - There are new cases beyond known contact; or
 - The floor/unit has residents who are unable to follow public health measures.
- If necessary, **residents who were NOT exposed to COVID-19 at a home in active outbreak from which they are transferring** (uncontrolled/uncontained) **may be transferred if:**
 - The resident is fully vaccinated and boosted (3rd or 4th dose);
 - The resident (or decision-maker) is aware of the risks;
 - The resident is admitted/transferred to a private room;
 - The resident is asymptomatic on discharge from the acute care facility; or
 - The resident has been isolated until the outbreak in the home from which they are transferring is contained and the PHU has determined that isolation may be safely discontinued.
- When a **health care facility is in an outbreak** there are new conditions for when consultation with a PHU is required to allow the admission or transfer from the health care facility to proceed.
- There are new requirements for screening, testing and isolation for **admissions from the community** based on whether the resident is vaccinated and boosted (3rd or 4th dose).

Social Gathering and Organized Events

- Social gathering and organized events will be permitted at all times including **higher intensity exercise classes** (e.g. cardio) and **social activities that include singing, dancing, and performing music**. For higher risk activities, residents must wear at a minimum a medical mask, if tolerated, and maintain generous physical distancing (at least 2 metres). For all other activities, residents should be strongly encouraged to wear, at a minimum, a medical mask and must maintain physical distancing.

- Retirement homes may operate saunas, steam rooms, indoor pools, libraries and indoor sport and recreational fitness facilities (including gyms), at **50% capacity**.
- It is strongly recommended that retirement homes keep attendance records for all social activities, organized events, gatherings, communal dining, and other recreational activities to help facilitate contact tracing should there be a positive case of COVID-19.
- Residents, staff, and fully vaccinated Essential Visitors may continue to attend social gatherings and organized events. General Visitors who are required to facilitate the programs, events, or religious services **may only attend** if they are fully vaccinated, pass active screening and demonstrate a negative antigen point-of-care test.

Outbreak Restrictions

- The policy has been **updated to clarify resident isolation requirements and the activities that might still be permitted while the retirement home is in outbreak** in alignment with the *Ministry of Health's Long-Term Care Home and Retirement Home Guidance for Public Health Units* released on February 3.
- At the discretion of the PHU and where operationally feasible for the home:
 - Group activities, dining, and other social gatherings may continue or resume in areas of the home (e.g., floors/units) not affected by the outbreak if residents are able to adhere to public health measures (e.g., masking, physical distancing).
 - Group activities/gatherings within an outbreak area of the home (e.g., floors/units) may continue/resume for specific cohorts (e.g., previously infected with COVID-19). Considerations may include whether:
 - Appropriate staff cohorting can be maintained;
 - There have been no concerns raised on the IPAC audits of the homes that are unaddressed; and
 - Residents within the cohort are able to adhere to public health measures (e.g., masking).
 - Activities for residents in isolation may continue or resume. For example:
 - 1:1 walks in an empty hallway with a high-risk contact or case and staff or Essential Caregiver, both with appropriate use of masking or PPE.
 - Staff or Essential Caregiver supported visits to a designated room other than the residents' room where others are not occupying or travelling through.

We want to acknowledge and thank retirement home operators, staff, and other support workers for their ongoing and tireless work in supporting residents and prioritizing their safety and wellbeing. We also want to thank all the retirement home residents and their family members who have gone to great lengths to protect and help others during the COVID-19 pandemic.

For additional support and information, please contact RHInquiries@ontario.ca.

Sincerely,

Original Signed By

Jaqueline Cureton
Assistant Deputy Minister

c: Jay O'Neill, Registrar and Chief Executive Officer, Retirement Homes Regulatory Authority
Cathy Hecimovich, Chief Executive Officer, Ontario Retirement Communities Association
Lisa Levin, Chief Executive Officer, AdvantAge Ontario

Attachments:

- *COVID-19 Guidance: Long-Term Care Homes and Retirement Homes for Public Health Units*