

October 6, 2022

MEMORANDUM TO: Retirement Homes

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

SUBJECT: COVID-19 Guidance Updates for the Retirement Home
Sector

I am writing to inform you of updates to:

- The Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility's (MSSA) *COVID-19 Guidance Document for Retirement Homes in Ontario* (MSAA COVID-19 Guidance); and
- The Ministry of Health's (MOH) *COVID-19 Guidance: Long-Term Care Homes, Retirement Homes and other Congregate Living Settings for Public Health Units* (MOH COVID-19 Guidance), formerly *MOH's COVID-19 Guidance: Long-Term Care Homes and Retirement Homes for Public Health Units*.

Based on the current status of the pandemic and the measures that have been lifted across the province in various settings, changes have been made to MSAA's and MOH's COVID-19 Guidance to further ease measures in retirement homes to balance resident health and safety with mental health and emotional well-being. The changes outlined below have been made in consultation with the Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health (OCMOH) and will take effect on October 6, 2022.

While this update signals continued efforts to move to a state of normalcy as we learn to live with COVID-19, reintroduction of some measures may be needed should the circumstances of the pandemic worsen significantly during the Fall and Winter respiratory season.

MSAA COVID-19 Guidance Updates

Screening

- **Although active screening is still recommended for visitors, operators may shift to passive screening for staff, students, and volunteers.** Passive screening includes steps taken by staff, students, and volunteers independently to ensure that they are not experiencing any symptoms consistent with COVID-19 prior to entering the retirement home.

- Homes should have an established process for conducting active screening for COVID-19 symptoms and exposures for visitors entering the home and ensure this is clearly communicated and well-understood. The [Ministry of Health's COVID-19 Screening Tool for Long-Term Care Homes and Retirement Homes](#) remains available to help facilitate the home's screening process.
- Homes should continue to post signage that lists the symptoms of COVID-19 for self-monitoring and the steps to take if COVID-19 is suspected or confirmed in a staff, student, volunteer, visitor, or resident.
- Screening updates have been made considering the lowest risk change to ensure resident safety while maintaining high vaccination rates and additional public health measures in the sector.

Absences

- Residents will **no longer be required to test upon return from temporary absences**.
- Residents are strongly encouraged to continue to wear masks when away from their home to reduce the risk of infection. As a reminder, it is still required that residents be actively screened for COVID-19 symptoms or exposure upon their return from an absence.
- Changes to testing requirements following temporary absences have been made with consideration of resident mental health and to lessen the resource burden for operators.

Masking

- While **masking continues to be strongly recommended, all visitors will be able to remove their mask while in a resident's room**. Mandatory masking for staff, students, volunteers, and visitors while indoors (not in a resident's room) will continue.
- Outdoor masking for staff, students, volunteers, visitors and residents will continue to be recommended but not required.
- Staff, students, and volunteers must continue to follow masking requirements as set out in MSAA's COVID-19 Guidance. Diligence with masking in the remaining required situations remains an important defense mechanism to help minimize the spread of COVID-19.
- Masking updates have been made to balance the risks and benefits to resident quality of life while encouraging visitors for residents.

Physical Distancing

- Retirement homes are **no longer required to implement physical distancing** (e.g., a minimum of 2m or 6ft between individuals); however, they should continue to adjust activities to optimize and support physical distancing where possible.
- All individuals should be encouraged to avoid situations where COVID-19 can spread more easily such as crowded places with many people nearby, close-contact settings (e.g., social activities and events) or confined and enclosed spaces with poor ventilation.

- Physical distancing requirements have been revised to align with other vulnerable congregate living settings.

Requirements for Home Visits

- Homes are **no longer required to maintain visitor logs and do not have to establish dedicated areas for indoor and outdoor visits.**
- In an effort to move towards normalcy, these preventative measures have been removed to lessen the resource burden for operators.

Visitor Training and Safety Review

- Based on feedback received from sector partners, visitor training and safety review requirements have been **updated to remove the verbal attestation requirement.**
- Visitors are required to review the specified documents and videos once and if there are any updates or changes.

MOH COVID-19 Guidance Updates

The MOH COVID-19 Guidance title has been revised to include other congregate living settings. It is a new version of the document referenced in the CMOH's June 10, 2022, memo to the Retirement Homes Regulatory Authority (RHRA) and constitutes guidance, advice, or recommendations given to retirement homes by the CMOH, which the licensee of a retirement home shall ensure are followed in the retirement home in accordance with clause 27(5) (0.a) of O. Reg. 166/11 under the *Retirement Homes Act, 2010*.

MOH's COVID-19 Guidance has been updated as follows:

- The outbreak definition has been adjusted to include only resident cases. It **no longer includes cases among staff and visitors.**
- The case and contact management requirements have been updated so that, in general, **resident close contacts within the unit/facility who remain asymptomatic do not need to be self-isolated or placed on Droplet and Contact Precautions.**
 - Resident close contacts should be monitored twice daily for symptoms, and strongly encouraged to wear a well-fitting mask, if tolerated, and physically distance from others when outside of their room for 10 days following their last exposure to the individual with COVID-19.
 - Public Health Units continue to retain discretion to require close contacts to isolate, depending on the context of their investigation during the outbreak.
- **Testing of asymptomatic residents being admitted or transferred from the community or a facility that is not in outbreak is no longer recommended.**

Thank you for your ongoing support in implementing these important infection prevention and control measures in retirement homes. We will continue to keep the

sector informed on requirements for retirement homes as the pandemic environment evolves.

If you have any questions, please contact our team at RHinquiries@ontario.ca.

Sincerely,

Original signed by

Jacqueline Cureton
Assistant Deputy Minister

- c: Nancy Matthews, Deputy Minister, Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility
- Dr. Barbara Yaffe, Associate Chief Medical Officer of Health, Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health
- Jay O'Neill, Chief Executive Officer and Registrar, Retirement Homes Regulatory Authority
- Cathy Hecimovich, Chief Executive Officer, Ontario Retirement Communities Association
- Lisa Levin, Chief Executive Officer, AdvantAge Ontario