

March 23, 2023

MEMORANDUM TO: Retirement Homes

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

SUBJECT: MSAA COVID-19 Guidance Updates

The Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility (MSAA) has been consulting with the Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health (OCMOH) to embed important infection prevention and control (IPAC) practices into routine operations beyond the pandemic state. These discussions are based on lessons learned throughout the last several years and the expected new “steady state” of COVID-19 where activity is expected to fluctuate at a baseline level.

While these important discussions are underway, MSAA has aligned with other congregate living settings to ensure only the necessary COVID-19 protocols are in place to protect resident safety. As a result, the *Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility COVID-19 Guidance Document for Retirement Homes in Ontario* (MSAA COVID-19 Guidance) has been revised to reflect the appropriate evidence-based preventative measures while prioritizing resident well-being, reducing staffing burdens, and addressing operator feedback.

Effective March 29, 2023, the following updates have been made to the MSAA COVID-19 Guidance:

Masking: While outdoor masking continues to be recommended for staff, students, and volunteers, outdoor masking for visitors and residents is no longer recommended. Indoor masking requirements will continue for staff, students, volunteers, and visitors; however, visitors continue to be able to remove their mask while in a resident’s room.

Screening: While passive screening requirements for all those entering the retirement home continue, active screening by the home is not required. Homes should continue to communicate (e.g., signage) to all those entering the retirement home that they are not to enter if they are feeling ill, symptomatic or have tested positive for COVID-19.

Physical Distancing: To support resident mental health and to encourage social activities for residents, physical distancing is no longer recommended during gatherings, organized events, communal dining, and recreational services.

Daily Resident Symptom Assessments: Homes should continue to conduct daily symptom assessments of all residents to identify if any resident has symptoms of COVID-19. To reduce burden on resources and staff, temperature checks are only recommended if the resident is symptomatic, has tested positive for COVID-19, or has been exposed to COVID-19.

Resident Absences: Active screening is no longer required for resident's returning from any type of absence.

Retirement Home Tours: Tours for prospective residents may be offered in-person at all times, including during an outbreak; however, outbreak areas in the home should be avoided. Operators should consult with their public health units for any additional guidance on best practices during an outbreak.

Thank you for your ongoing support with the implementation of these important IPAC measures in retirement homes which ensure the safety and well-being of staff and residents. We hope that these changes appropriately reflect the feedback we've received to prioritize the mental health of residents and consider the staffing constraints across the sector. If you have any additional 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
Jay Jung, Chief of Staff, Office of the Minister 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