

December 20, 2023

MEMO TO: Retirement Home Operators and Licensees
FROM: Michèle Sanborn, Assistant Deputy Minister
Policy, Programs and Strategic Partnerships Division
Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility
SUBJECT: Holiday 2023 Reminders for the Retirement Home Sector

I am writing to provide a reminder of important infection prevention and control (IPAC) measures to ensure that retirement home staff, residents and their family members enjoy a safe and joyful holiday season.

The need for increased vigilance is critical at this time as Ontario is in the midst of a challenging respiratory illness season, with projected increases in influenza, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) and COVID-19 expected over the coming weeks. With concerns that the co-circulating respiratory illnesses will peak in late December and into January, staying up to date with vaccines continues to be the best defense against severe outcomes in advance of the holiday season.

Licensees and operators are strongly encouraged to promote and to share information about the advantages of the COVID-19 vaccine to all residents, staff, and visitors. As a reminder, licensees' obligations under the *Retirement Homes Act, 2010* and its Regulation include ensuring that residents, staff, and volunteers receive information about the advantages of an annual influenza vaccination and where the vaccination is available.

Additionally, the Ministry of Health is offering a publicly funded RSV vaccine program for all residents of retirement homes licenced to provide dementia care who are aged 60 years and older. I encourage eligible licensees and operators to work with their local public health unit to support residents in accessing the additional protection available to them through this vaccine.

Staff and visitors should also be reminded to [stay home](#) if they are sick and staff should follow public health guidance for [return to work](#).

We recognize that retirement homes have made great strides in their IPAC programs and related practices over the past several years and are taking the necessary steps to keep residents, families and staff safe. As social gatherings and organized events take place throughout the months of December and January, retirement homes should be

mindful of IPAC best practices, including performing hand hygiene and masking requirements and recommendations outlined in the enhanced masking [memo](#) released in November 2023. They should also implement a balanced approach to gatherings which considers the importance of mental health while supporting the implementation of IPAC best practices. I also recommend that licensees and operators review the resources shared through the fall preparedness [memo](#) in October 2023 on available supports including vaccines, antivirals, personal protective equipment, and rapid antigen tests.

IPAC leads in retirement homes who need additional support implementing IPAC best practices are encouraged to work with their local public health units or contact their local IPAC Hub. To connect with your local IPAC Hub or for additional information please contact IPACHubs@ontario.ca.

As always, thank you for your dedication in ensuring retirement home operations run smoothly, while prioritizing the safety and well-being of both residents and staff.

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

Sincerely,

Original signed by

Michèle Sanborn

c: Melissa Thomson, Deputy Minister, MSAA and MLTC
Marsha Pinto, Director, Retirement Homes Branch, MSAA
Dr. Barbara Yaffe, Associate Chief Medical Officer of Health, OCMOH
Dr. Michelle Murti, Associate Chief Medical Officer of Health, OCMOH
Jay O'Neill, Chief Executive Officer and Registrar, Retirement Homes Regulatory Authority
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