

March 5, 2024

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: Enhanced Masking Recommendation Update for Retirement
Homes

I am writing to provide you with an update on the temporary enhanced masking recommendations in retirement homes which were communicated through a [memo](#) on November 2, 2023.

The Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility (MSAA) has been working closely with the Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health (OCMOH) to monitor and assess the risk of respiratory illnesses in retirement homes as the respiratory season evolves. Recent trends have shown continued decreases in community level transmission of COVID-19, Influenza and Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV), as well as decreases in outcome indicators (e.g., hospitalizations, outbreaks and cases) in retirement homes. Simultaneously, 64% of retirement home residents are up to date with COVID-19 vaccination as of February 12, 2024.

Based on this advice, effective immediately, MSAA is ending the enhanced masking recommendations for retirement homes when the retirement home is not in outbreak. More specifically, MSAA is no longer recommending enhanced masking for retirement home staff, students, volunteers, and Essential Visitors who are health care workers when in resident areas indoors.

However, retirement homes must continue to follow the masking requirements found in the [MSAA COVID-19 Guidance for Retirement Homes in Ontario](#) which are as follows:

- Masks are required for staff, students, volunteers, and Essential Visitors who are health care workers, including Home and Community Care Support Services (HCCSS) workers, based on a point-of-care risk assessment (i.e., for determining if masking is needed before every resident interaction based on risk to the worker).
- Staff may consider wearing a mask while providing 1:1 care within 2 meters of an individual for 15 minutes or longer.

- Masks are recommended but not required for visitors who are not health care workers (e.g., families, friends, and caregivers who are not health care workers).

Please continue to work with your local public health unit on outbreak management as recommended in the Ministry of Health's [COVID-19 Guidance for Public Health Units: Long-Term Care Homes, Retirement Homes, and Other Congregate Living Settings](#). In addition, operators and licensees must be mindful of infection prevention and control (IPAC) obligations under the [Retirement Homes Act, 2010](#), which include ensuring the presence of an IPAC program that meets the requirements set out in Ontario Regulation 166/11 and IPAC training for all staff and volunteers.

As always, I 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 additional questions, please contact RHinquiries@ontario.ca.

Sincerely,

Original signed by

Michèle Sanborn

c: Melissa Thomson, Deputy Minister, MSAA and MLTC
Dr. Barbara Yaffe, Associate Chief Medical Officer of Health, OCMOH
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