

Ministry of Long-Term Care

Office of the Associate Deputy
Minister, Long-Term Care Policy
and Pandemic Response

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Ministère des Soins de longue durée

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January 14, 2021

MEMORANDUM TO: Long-Term Care Home Licensees

FROM: Erin Hannah
Associate Deputy Minister
LTC Policy and Pandemic Response

SUBJECT: Clarification on Immunization Policy and an update to the
COVID-19 Guidance Document

Thank you to you and your teams for your continued efforts over the past month and over the holiday season to keep residents and staff safe.

We have heard from residents, families, home operators and other stakeholders about important considerations to inform how we confront the challenges of the highly transmissible Omicron variant.

Today, I am writing to clarify the recent changes to mandate third doses of COVID-19 vaccines, the care that residents who are isolating or are placed under precautions should be provided, as well as highlight updates to the *COVID-19 Guidance Document for Long-Term Care Homes (Guidance Document)*.

Clarification on the Minister's Directive: Long-term Care Home COVID-19 Immunization Policy

Third dose eligibility

The requirement to receive a third dose of COVID-19 vaccine only applies to individuals once they become eligible for a third dose (i.e., 3 months after receiving the 2nd dose). Staff, support workers, student placements, volunteers and caregivers who are not eligible for a third dose by the established deadlines can continue to enter a long-term care home and should get a third dose as soon as possible after becoming eligible.

Third doses provide important extra protection from COVID-19. It is important for you and your leadership to communicate this to your team members. About 64% of LTC staff have a third dose based on COVax data. Based on home reported outbreak

information provided to the Ministry directly, among positive staff cases, about 7% have 3 doses and about 93% have two doses (based on information from January 12th).

Caregivers

The immunization policy directive states that caregivers who were eligible for a third dose on or before December 31, 2021 must receive their third dose by January 28, 2022, and caregivers who become eligible for a third dose on or after January 1, 2022 must receive their third dose by May 23, 2022 (unless a valid medical exemption is provided). As noted above, if a caregiver becomes eligible after May 23rd, they should receive their third dose as soon as possible after becoming eligible (i.e., 3 months after receiving the 2nd dose).

Where a caregiver has not received required doses by the deadlines, the visit should be restricted to the resident's room and every effort should be made to physically distance from other residents/individuals that are in the same room.

As a reminder, all caregivers must have at least one dose to enter a long-term care home, and as of February 21, 2022, all caregivers must have at least two doses to enter a long-term care home.

Extenuating circumstances

The immunization policy directive includes the ability for long-term care homes to provide a 7-day extension on a case-by-case basis where there are extenuating circumstances. This extension can be used, for example, when an individual (staff, support worker, student, volunteer or caregiver) cannot secure a vaccine appointment. Homes may also provide a 7-day extension more than once for the same person.

Other examples of circumstances where an extension might be needed include:

- An onsite clinic was cancelled due to an ongoing outbreak.
- An 18-29 year old waiting for a third dose of Pfizer, as per the Ministry of Health recommendation.
- Recent infection with COVID-19 (note, while there are currently no formal guidelines on the timing of the booster following infection, emerging evidence suggests a 30-day interval would maximize immune response).

Resident Care

We have received some questions about the care for residents. Specifically, regarding showering and bathing residents who are in isolation and/or under additional precautions. Please remind your staff that residents should have access to showers and baths, including when a home or areas of a home are experiencing an outbreak.

Updates to the MLTC Guidance Document

Return to Work Risk-Based Framework

To continue to support homes in serious staffing shortages, the Ministry has further evolved the test-to-work and return to work guidance, by introducing a Return to Work Risk-Based Framework for fully vaccinated staff who are high risk **close contacts** with someone who is COVID-19 positive or who is **COVID-19 positive**. This framework outlines staffing options based on risk (lowest, moderate). Homes are to evaluate their own circumstances to determine the best option to apply based on their staffing needs, with the lowest risk options being preferred whenever possible.

Please refer to the table in the updated attached LTC COVID-19 Guidance Document for the Return to Work Risk-Based Framework.

Caregivers supporting more than one symptomatic or isolating resident

We have been asked about caregivers who want to volunteer to support more than one resident during an outbreak. We recognize caregivers play an integral role in homes and in residents' lives. Based on public health advice, caregivers may support up to two residents who are COVID-19 positive, provided the home obtains consent from all involved residents (or their substitute decision makers). Caregivers may also support more than one resident in non-outbreak situations, with the same expectation regarding resident consent.

We will continue to provide updates as the response to the fourth wave evolves. The Ministry is actively working with our partners, including public health, to return to more normal times for residents and families. We recognize the impact temporary enhanced measures have on residents and family members' lives and will seek to ease measures as soon as we can. Thank you again for your ongoing efforts. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us at MLTCPandemicResponse@ontario.ca.

Sincerely,

Original signed by

Erin Hannah
Associate Deputy Minister
LTC Policy and Pandemic Response

Attachments:

- COVID-19 Guidance Document for Long-Term Care Homes.
- LTC Pandemic Response Frequently Asked Questions
- What Residents Can Expect - French version
- LTC Visitor, Absences and Social Gatherings - French version

c: Nancy Matthews, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Long-Term Care (MLTC)
Dr. Catherine Zahn, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Health (MOH)
Dr. Kieran Moore, Chief Medical Officer of Health
Dr. Barbara Yaffe, Associate Chief Medical Officer of Health
Alison Blair, Associate Deputy Minister, Pandemic Response and Recovery
Division, Ministry of Health (MOH)
Melissa Thomson, Assistant Deputy Minister, MOH
Michael Hillmer, Assistant Deputy Minister, Capacity Planning and Analytics
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Matthew Anderson, President and CEO, Ontario Health
Lisa Levin, Chief Executive Officer, AdvantAge Ontario
Donna Duncan, Chief Executive Officer, Ontario Long-Term Care Association
Monika Turner, Association of Municipalities of Ontario
Michael Jacek, Association of Municipalities of Ontario
Colleen Geiger, President and CEO (Acting), Public Health Ontario
Jeff Butler, Assistant Deputy Minister, Operations, MLTC