

Ministry of Long-Term Care

Fact Sheet for Long-Term Care Home Residents, Families and Caregivers: Celebrating the Holiday Season Safely

Maintaining the health and well-being of individuals living in long-term care homes remains a top priority, especially at a time when respiratory illnesses, such as COVID-19, influenza (flu) and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), are high. **Below are some important reminders for residents, families and caregivers.**

Vaccines and Therapeutics

- ✓ Getting vaccinated and staying up-to-date on your vaccines is the best way to prevent severe illness.
- ✓ You can get your Fall COVID-19 vaccine (XBB) as early as three months following infection or last dose. There is no need to get a second Fall COVID-19 vaccine (XBB) if you have already received your Fall COVID-19 vaccine.
- ✓ You can get the COVID-19 and flu vaccines at the same time or at any time before or after one another. For the RSV vaccine, it is recommended that you get it at least 14 days before or after receiving other vaccines, including COVID-19 and/or flu vaccines.
- ✓ Speak to your long-term care home about getting proactively pre-assessed for antiviral treatment for COVID-19 and flu, such Paxlovid (or Remdesivir) and Tamiflu (or Relenza), so that you can access treatment faster if you become ill.

Masking

- ✓ Staff are required to wear a mask when in resident areas.
- ✓ It is strongly recommended that visitors and caregivers wear a mask in resident areas except when they are visiting with a resident or when eating or drinking with residents in a common area.
- ✓ If a resident has a roommate and is uncomfortable with others removing their mask, please let your home know. Homes have been encouraged,

where possible, to designate a space that allows for resident roommates to visit with friends and family without needing to mask.

Visiting and Holiday Celebrations

- ✓ Residents have a right to receive visitors – your family and friends are encouraged to visit you, but should avoid visiting when they are ill, even with mild symptoms.
- ✓ Visitors who cannot visit in-person can keep in touch with residents by phone or video chat.
- ✓ Visitors should follow infection prevention and control practices, such as washing hands and wearing a mask.
- ✓ Homes are being encouraged to support safe holiday celebrations. Please speak with staff in your home to find out what the home is doing to support residents in celebrating the holidays and special occasions.

Infection Prevention and Control (IPAC) Practices

Following infection prevention and control practices in long-term care homes is important at all times and especially during respiratory season. Your long-term care home is prepared to keep residents and your loved ones safe this holiday season. You can also help make sure your home is safe by:

- ✓ Washing your hands often using hand sanitizer or soap and water
- ✓ Staying up to date with vaccinations
- ✓ Wearing a mask, if and when possible
- ✓ Letting staff know if you are feeling ill, and
- ✓ Telling your friends and family not to visit when they are ill.

What to expect if your home is in outbreak

Residents can expect the following if your home, or the area of the home you live in, is in outbreak:

- ✓ Staff, caregivers and visitors need to wear a mask at all times.
- ✓ Group activities, dining and social gatherings may continue in non-outbreak areas if residents can follow public health measures.
- ✓ Residents may be organized into small groups, or cohorts, for essential activities where feasible.

- ✓ Communal dining, non-essential activities and personal care services may be suspended or modified.
- ✓ Caregivers can still visit during an outbreak, but general visitors may be restricted.
- ✓ Homes are expected to regularly communicate with residents and your families about the status of the outbreaks.
- ✓ If a resident has COVID-19 and is unable to wear a mask, you will be isolated for a minimum of 10 days and until you are feeling better. If you can wear a mask, you can leave isolation after five days if you are feeling better but must wear a mask when outside of your room.
 - While isolated, you may leave your room for walks in the immediate area, with a staff person who is wearing personal protective equipment, to support overall physical and mental well-being.
- ✓ If a resident's roommate has COVID-19, you will also be isolated in case you also have COVID-19.
 - If you do not develop symptoms, you may discontinue isolation after a minimum of five days. After five days, you should wear a well-fitting mask, if tolerated, and physically distance from others when outside of your room for at least seven days from the last time you may have been exposed to COVID-19.
- ✓ Homes cannot restrict or deny absences for medical, palliative or compassionate reasons at any time, including if you are in isolation or when your home is in an outbreak.

For more information or assistance, you may contact the Ministry of Long-Term Care at: ltcinfo@ontario.ca or you can file a complaint or concern with the ministry using the Long-Term Care Family and Support Action Line: 1-866-434-0144 (8:30 am – 7:00pm)

December 2023