



April 27, 2020

CLIFF #1162698

HCC Vice Presidents
Regional Health Authorities

As you know, the Ministry of Health continues to focus on limiting the spread of COVID-19 in our communities and at a provincial level. Most people who become infected with COVID-19 will experience a mild illness that will not require medical care, but those who are elderly or who have underlying conditions that compromise the immune system continue to be at a high risk for severe illness.

Seniors are at a higher risk of serious illness from COVID-19, which requires enhanced protection measures aimed at limiting the spread of the virus in Long Term Care (LTC) homes and assisted living (AL) residences. In March, the Ministry of Health approved temporary adjustments to LTC policies, directing health authorities and operators to take actions to protect those most vulnerable and address anticipated pressures on the acute care system. In consultation with the Provincial Health Officer, the Ministry extended these changes to seniors AL as well.

The Covid-19 pandemic in the province is evolving rapidly and the Ministry is committed to ongoing review of policy changes to ensure our response is evolving to meet the needs of seniors. Over the last few weeks, health authorities have largely addressed the need to build surge capacity in acute and BC has had some success in flattening the curve of COVID-19 infections, though outbreaks in LTC and AL continue to be a risk.

Health authorities and operators have indicated that the number of people waiting in community for placement continues to grow, and the inability to fill vacant beds in LTC and AL from those on the waitlist is becoming a challenge. To support the health needs of those waiting in community for LTC and AL and respond appropriately to the current COVID-19 situation in B.C., the Ministry is now recommending that:

- LTC and seniors AL facilities resume admissions from the community as per their previous waitlist and in alignment with policy and health authority processes.
- Health authorities continue to prioritize admissions from acute care.

However, as outbreaks in LTC and AL continue to be a risk, the Ministry, with input from the Provincial Health Officer, advises:

- All admissions from community into both private and publicly funded LTC and seniors AL beds/units are required to adhere to local and provincial requirements regarding infection prevention and control procedures.
- As per the Public Health Agency of Canada recommendations, residents being admitted from the community should be placed under isolation with Droplet and Contact precautions for 14 days on arrival to the facility. They should be **preferentially admitted to a single room** if available or semi-private with curtains drawn between beds, maintaining at least 2 metres between residents.

As per the Infection Prevention and Control Outbreak Protocol for COVID-19, in the event of an outbreak in a care facility, this direction changes and restricts all admissions in accordance with advice and direction from the local Medical Health Officer.

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to evolve, Ministry staff will continue to engage with health authority home and community care leads and operators to discuss issues and provide direction and advice in response to the situation.

Sincerely,



Teri Collins
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Specialized Services Division
Ministry of Health