

Questions and Answers

Long-Term Care and Seniors’ Assisted Living Facilities – B.C.’s Restart Plan

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Easing of restrictions based on B.C.’s Restart Plan:

1. What are the key changes you are making to ease restrictions for visitation in long-term care (LTC) and seniors’ assisted living (AL) facilities?

- Visitors will no longer need to schedule or book their visit in advance.
- Operators may designate visiting hours in order to ensure there is adequate staff to support safe visiting practices, with an expectation that significant opportunities must be made available daily with visiting options in the morning, afternoon and evenings, on weekdays as well as weekends. Each site will also continue to maintain a visitor list or sign-in list for contact tracing purposes if necessary.
- The limit on the number of social visitors each resident can have has been removed. Decisions on the number of social visitors at one time should be based on: the site capacity, each facility’s communicable disease prevention plan as described in WorkSafeBC’s [guide](#) for employers, and resident need and well-being in support of meaningful visits.

2. Will social and recreational events be allowed at LTC and seniors' AL facilities?

- Yes, larger, facility-wide social events or gatherings may occur. Indoor gatherings may include residents and staff across units/floors of a facility. Outdoor events/gatherings may include family and friends.
- The number of visitors at outdoor social gatherings must align with current provincial health officer (PHO) guidance, each facility's communicable disease prevention plan as described in WorkSafeBC's [guide](#) for employers and follow appropriate infection prevention and control (IPC) practices to ensure the safety of all staff, residents, and visitors.

3. What other requirements remain in effect for visitors and residents in LTC and seniors' AL facilities?

- Residents and visitors still need to continue to practice proper hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette.
- Visitors will still be **screened for signs and symptoms of illness, including COVID-19, before their visits.**
- When visiting a resident requiring additional precautions (e.g., droplet and contact precautions) all visitors will need to also use any required personal protective equipment. All visitors will still be asked to limit movements throughout the facility while visiting.
- If the visitor is unable to adhere to appropriate precautions, the visitor shall be excluded from visiting.
- Social visitation will be suspended if there is an active COVID-19 outbreak at the facility.

4. Why are you making these changes now?

- Recognizing that LTC and seniors' AL residences are home to some of our most vulnerable citizens who are at risk of serious complications from COVID-19, the Province implemented restrictions to reduce the risk of transmission for residents and staff during the earlier phases of the pandemic.

- While the restrictions were necessary to keep residents and staff safe, we know they have been challenging for many residents and their families.
- The ministry and the PHO regularly review communicable disease guidelines and policies.
- As such, the Province is making adjustments to LTC and seniors' AL policies and easing several restrictions for residents, families and visitors, in alignment with increased vaccination rates and reopening in broader communities.
- The new visitation policy will come into effect on July 19, 2021.

5. Are volunteers now allowed back into LTC and seniors' AL facilities?

- Yes. Non-essential volunteers will be allowed to return to LTC and seniors' AL facilities. Volunteers must be fully immunized (14 days after receiving the second dose of COVID-19 vaccine) and they will be expected to provide proof of full immunization and adhere to all IPC requirements.

6. Do these changes allow sites to start responsible in-person tours of a LTC or AL facility to show potential new residents, assuming appropriate safety measures are in place?

- Yes, tours of the facility can resume.
- Individuals touring the facility will be required to wear medical masks and adhere to IPC requirements including screening upon entry, hand hygiene and physical distancing while they are on-site.

Masks:

7. Does this mean fully immunized staff will not have to wear a medical mask or eye protection?

- If a staff member is fully immunized against COVID-19 (14 days after receiving the second dose of COVID-19 vaccine) they will not be required to wear a mask or eye protection unless clinically indicated for individuals on precautions; when there is a risk of contamination due to splashing of body fluids; required based on their point-of-care assessment or to protect against the normal hazards in their regular work.

- Staff who are not confirmed to be fully immunized will continue to be required to wear a medical mask and undergo regular rapid testing.
- During an outbreak at the facility or if regional communicable disease transmission levels are determined to be a risk the MHO has the authority to implement mandatory mask use in a specific health authority or region.

8. Will staff be required to monitor visits to ensure that people who are not fully immunized do not remove their masks?

- No, staff are not required to monitor visits, but they should remind visitors of the IPC practices they need to follow during their visits.

9. Why do I still have to wear a medical mask and follow the IPC measures when in common areas/hallways when I'm fully immunized?

- We have heard questions from health authorities, health-care providers, staff and patients on whether the ministry's [Mask Use in Health-Care Facilities policy](#) will be amended, as other sectors shift toward the new recommendations for mask use under the restart plan.
- Health-care facilities including acute care settings, long-term care homes, seniors' assisted living facilities, family doctors' offices and community-based clinics are distinct from other public settings because there is a higher risk of exposure to respiratory illness and other communicable diseases.
- The health and safety of residents, visitors and staff continue to be our number one priority. The ministry is reviewing the policy and having discussions with the PHO, the BC Centre for Disease Control, health authorities and key health partners on next steps for guidelines for infection prevention and control measures in health-care facilities, including the use of medical masks.
- Fully immunized visitors (14 days after receiving the second dose of COVID-19 vaccine) have the potential to come into contact with a number of people while in common areas/ hallways and for this reason, will be required to wear a medical mask while moving through the facility. They will not be required to wear a mask while in direct contact with the person they are visiting or when outdoors.

- Visitors who do not provide proof that they are fully immunized are required to wear a medical mask for the duration of their visit, both in common areas and when in direct contact with the person they are visiting.

10. How will you minimize the risk for visits in multi-bed rooms? Do visitors or residents need to wear masks inside the room?

- Whenever possible, residents residing in multi-bed rooms should receive visitors in a separate, designated location.
- In situations where a resident is unable to move to a designated visiting area and visiting occurs in a multi-bed room, visitors must maintain physical distance from the other residents and the number of visitors may be limited.
- All visitors will be required to wear medical masks inside the facility. Those who are fully immunized will need to wear a medical mask while they are moving around the facility or in common areas, but not when they are inside the resident's room and in direct contact with the resident, as long as physical distance can be maintained from other residents in the room. Those who are not fully immunized will need to wear medical masks at all times.

11. Are children required to wear medical masks?

- Based on stage 3 of [B.C.'s Restart Plan](#), masks are recommended in indoor public settings for all people 12 and older who are not yet fully immunized (14 days after receiving the second dose of COVID-19 vaccine).
- Children over the age of two should be encouraged to wear a mask if they can.
- The risk of COVID-19 spread to health-care workers and residents from young children is low in a health-care setting where there are many other preventative measures in place.

Immunization and testing:

12. Are visitors required to provide proof of immunization?

- It is strongly recommended that visitors be fully immunized against COVID-19 (two doses of the vaccine, with the second dose received a minimum of two

weeks' prior to the visit) and they will be required to provide proof of immunization before entry to the facility.

- Those who do not have proof of immunization or choose not to provide it, will be required to wear a medical mask for the duration of their visit, including when in direct contact with the person they are visiting.

13. What is accepted as proof of COVID-19 immunization?

- Most people are given a paper record from their regional health authority or pharmacy when they receive their COVID-19 vaccines*. For example, people in the Island Health region were given a COVID-19 Immunization Record Card with space for information on the vaccines they received.

**Please note that there is no standardized provincewide paper record and each health authority and/or pharmacy provides their own version.*

- The paper record is a permanent record of a person's immunization status and has important information about their first and second doses of the vaccine (such as dates, product name, lot number and immunization clinic).
- People can also check for your immunization record online by registering for the [Health Gateway](#). It is a secure, provincial database where you, public health and their doctor can access your health records including a digital version of their COVID-19 immunization records.
- Facility operators and screeners are not expected to verify the proof of immunization provided.

14. What is considered being fully immunized for COVID-19?

- An individual is considered fully immunized 14 days after receiving their second dose.
- It is important to note that medical knowledge about COVID-19 continues to evolve as new evidence emerges. If an additional dose (booster) is recommended for greater protection in the future, the BC Centre for Disease

Control and the province will announce updates as more information becomes available.

15. Will visitors be required to provide proof of immunization at every visit?

- No. Facilities are still required to maintain visitor lists for contact tracing purposes. It is expected that facilities will also maintain a list of visitors' vaccination status and will be able to share this list with public health should it be required.
- Regular visitors will only need to provide proof once.
- If immunization requirements change (e.g., in case a booster vaccine is required for optimal protection against COVID-19), visitors may be required to provide additional proof in the future.

16. Will you allow people who are not fully immunized to visit the facility?

- It is strongly recommended that visitors aged 12 and older be immunized for COVID-19 if they are able, to protect themselves, their families and friends and especially their loved ones in LTC and seniors' AL facilities.
- While immunizing as many people as possible is the goal, immunization is not mandatory for visitors, staff or residents.
- We recognize that there are a number of reasons why an individual may not be immunized, including due to medical conditions.
- As well, there are younger children under age 12 who aren't able to receive the vaccines yet, and adults who have received their first dose but are waiting for their second dose.
- For these reasons, visitors who are not yet fully immunized will continue to be allowed to visit a LTC or seniors' AL facility, but they are required to wear medical masks for the duration of their visit including when in direct contact with the person they are visiting.

17. What about visitors who were immunized outside of B.C.?

- If a visitor received one or two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine in another province or country, they must [submit proof](#) of an official vaccination record. Their official immunization record should be presented at the facility as proof of immunization.

18. Are operators expected to keep track of visitor immunization status?

- Yes. It is expected that facilities will maintain a list of visitors' vaccination status and will be able to share this list with public health should it be required.
- Maintaining a list of immunization status will also support operators to expedite the screening process because they won't have to ask visitors for proof of immunization at every visit.

19. As more people are immunized and the province moves to stage 4 of the Restart Plan, will you remove all the restrictions at LTC and seniors' AL facilities?

- The Province had implemented restrictions at LTC and seniors' AL facilities to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission for residents and staff during the earlier phases of the pandemic.
- That said, we know how important visits are to the health and wellbeing of residents, their families and friends, which is why we are easing many of restrictions based on the current immunization situation at LTC and seniors' AL facilities.
- We regularly re-evaluate the restrictions that are still in place. We will continue to revisit restrictions and may adjust based on the progress of immunization and the COVID-19 situation in the community.

Social visiting:

20. If there is an outbreak will social visitation be suspended?

- Yes, social visitation will be suspended when there is an active outbreak as defined in the [COVID-19 Provincial Outbreak Management Protocol](#).

21. Is there a requirement for operators for enhanced cleaning of resident rooms after each visit?

- No. Unless a visit is in a common area, there is no expectation of enhanced cleaning after a social visit in a resident's room.

22. Are inter-facility and intra-facility social visits be permitted? Can a resident visit with a friend or family member who lives in a different unit or facility?

- Residents can visit friends and family members who live in other facilities, but must follow all guidelines for social visits as any other social visitor would (please see [Ministry of Health - Overview of Visitors in Long-Term Care and Seniors' Assisted Living](#)).

Outings, dining and group recreational activities:

23. Is there a limit to the number of outings a resident can have or the length of their outings?

- No. Residents may leave the facility for outings and family visits, and there is no requirement for residents to isolate when they return from an outing.
- Operators should continue to support residents on social outings including leaving the facility for family visits and activities.
- While there is no restriction on the length of outings, residents should keep in mind that settings outside of their facility may not have as rigorous IPC practices as their facilities and the risk of transmission for COVID-19 and other illnesses may be higher.
- As a result, when residents are outside of the facilities, they should follow general infection prevention best practices such as maintaining physical distance from other people where possible, frequent hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette when they are in indoor public settings or are unable to maintain a physical distance from others.
- Public health guidelines also recommend people 12 and older who are not yet fully immunized to wear masks in indoor public settings or where physical

distance cannot be maintained. For more information, visit the B.C.'s Restart Plan [webpage](#).

- Also, residents should bear in mind that while communities are proceeding to stage 3 of B.C.'s Restart Plan and reopening, there are still some restrictions that remain in place (such as the size of indoor and outdoor organized gatherings) and they should adhere to the same restrictions as everyone else in the community.
- Visit the province-wide restrictions [webpage](#) for more information on the restrictions that are in effect in B.C.

24. Are residents able to go on overnight visits with family or friends?

- Yes, residents are able to go on overnight visits, if they choose, and there is no requirement for residents to isolate when they return from an outing.

25. Can seniors' AL residents have overnight guests?

- Yes, seniors' AL residents can have overnight visitors.

26. Can residents go on bus outings now?

- Yes, bus outings are allowed.
- Groups on bus outings should follow general infection prevention and control practices as on any other outing.

27. Can residents and visitors participate in social activities with food?

- Yes, communal dining activities can resume.
- Facility-wide indoor social events/gatherings may occur involving residents and staff from multiple units/floors of a facility. Outdoor social events may include staff, residents and visitors (e.g., summer BBQs) in alignment with the current PHO guidance while adhering to applicable IPC practices to ensure the safety of all staff, residents, and visitors.

28. Are residents required to wear medical masks for shared dining and small group social or recreational activities?

- In general, residents without suspected or confirmed COVID-19 illness are not required to wear a medical mask when they move around in the facility. This includes when dining or participating in group events. They are also not required to maintain physical distancing from other residents.
- Only residents with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 illness are required to wear medical masks (if tolerated) or use tissues to cover their mouth and nose. In these situations, these residents are required to isolate and stay in their rooms or bed space as much as possible to minimize the risk of transmission to other residents and staff.

Essential visits:

29. Have you also made changes to the essential visitor policy?

- No changes have been made to the essential visitor policy for LTC and seniors' AL facilities and it remains in effect.
- The essential visitor guidelines include:
 - Visits for compassionate care, including critical illness, palliative care, hospice care, end of life and medical assistance in dying.
 - Visits paramount to the patient/client's physical care and mental well-being, including:
 - Assistance with feeding mobility or personal care;
 - Communication assistance and supported decision-making for people with disabilities; and,
 - Existing registered volunteers providing services as described.
 - Essential visits are limited to one visitor at a time. For palliative and end-of-life care, more than one visitor may be allowed at a time.

30. If an individual has questions or concerns about decisions made regarding their visitor status. What is the process?

- Visitors can request an immediate review of any decisions made related to their visitor status and will be able to speak with an administrator or administrator on call.
- Further reviews of decisions are done through, or facilitated by, the health authority Patient Care Quality Office.
- If a visitor remains unsatisfied, a formal appeal for review can be submitted to the PHO.
- For more information on the review process, please see the Ministry of Health's overview of visitors in long-term care and seniors' assisted living guidance, available online [here](#).

PHO order on facility staff assignment (single-site)

31. Will the PHO rescind the [long-term care facility staff assignment order](#) for immunized health-care workers so they can work at different facilities instead of being restricted to a single site?

- LTC and seniors' AL facilities are home to some of our most vulnerable citizens who are at risk of serious complications from COVID-19. Given the outbreaks at LTC and seniors' AL facilities and the impact on residents as well as staff during the earlier phases of the pandemic, the province implemented restrictions to reduce the risk of transmission.
- This includes the PHO order to limit the movement of staff and volunteer between facilities. People moving between facilities including staff and volunteers can promote the transmission of COVID-19 and increase the risk of infection for persons-in-care, patients, residents, other staff and volunteers.
- While the majority of residents, staff and health-care workers at LTC and seniors' AL facilities have received their first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine and will receive their second dose soon, the facts remain that: immunization provides very high protection for most people but it is not 100% guaranteed protection, and residents are medically vulnerable to COVID-19 as well as other respiratory illnesses (such as influenza) even when they are fully immunized.

- For these reasons, the PHO's [Facility Staff Assignment Order](#) remains in effect for the safety of residents, staff and volunteers. The ministry and the PHO review COVID-19 guidelines as well policies regularly. We will continue to keep LTC and seniors' AL operators, staff, residents and their families as well as visitors informed of future changes to PHO orders and public health guidance in the future.
- To address staffing challenges, the Ministry of Health will work closely with health authorities, unions and operators to work through the details of how best to identify and enable pools of fully immunized staff to move between sites.