



March 17, 2020

Dear Stakeholder:

The focus in BC continues to be to contain the spread of COVID-19 in our communities and at a provincial level. The majority of people who become infected with COVID-19 will experience a mild illness that will not require medical care, but those who are vulnerable to the disease – those who are elderly or who have underlying conditions that compromise the immune system – are at risk for severe illness.

To protect those most vulnerable, **I am advising Long-Term Care Facilities to restrict visitors to essential visits only.** Restricting visitors will minimize the risk of the introduction of COVID-19 into facilities and allow staff to focus on caring for residents, rather than monitoring and screening visitors. Effective immediately, visits to Long-Term Care Facilities in BC will be restricted to essential visits only. Examples of essential visits include, but are not limited to:

- visits for compassionate care (end of life and critical illness)
- visits considered paramount to resident care and well being, such as assistance with feeding or mobility
- existing registered volunteers providing services as described above only

This restriction to essential visits only allows health authorities and operators some implementation flexibility to ensure vital resident needs can continue to be met, while still applying a serious lens. There is a recognition that, at this time, stricter limitations on visitors has the potential to increase anxiety for residents and families, as well as put additional pressure on health care workers where families provide invaluable support with activities of daily living and non-clinical care to support their loved ones – however, in an effort to control transmission, it is essential.

Current direction/guidance regarding visitors to Long Term Care Facilities still applies to essential visitors:

- Increased communications and signage in facilities on infection prevention
 - Do not visit if you've travelled outside of the country;
 - Stay away if you're sick;
 - Wash your hands;
 - Visit in small groups and directly in resident rooms, rather than common areas.
- Early assessment and isolation of anyone experiencing symptoms
- Additional cleaning and disinfecting

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 visitors to Long Term Care Facilities in accordance with advice and direction from the local Medical Health Officer.

We expect that transmission of COVID-19 will continue to increase in the province and are providing direction and advice in response to the situation as it evolves in an effort to slow transmission and protect those most vulnerable to serious illness.

Please continue to monitor the BC Centre for Disease Control website on COVID-19 for updates, information, and resources: www.bccdc.ca/covid19.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bonnie Henry". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "B" and "H".

Bonnie Henry
MD, MPH, FRCPC
Provincial Health Officer