

March 24, 2021

Long-Term Care and Seniors' Assisted Living Operators

Dear Operators:

Since March 2020, visitation has been restricted in all long-term care (LTC) homes and seniors' assisted living (AL) residences in BC to prevent the introduction and spread of COVID-19 and protect those most vulnerable to serious illness or death from the virus. The restrictions and guidance on visitation are legally grounded in an order of the Provincial Health Officer (PHO) (*Visitation and Visitor Appeal and Review Order*: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/health/about-bc-s-health-care-system/office-of-the-provincial-health-officer/covid-19/covid-19-pho-order-visitation.pdf>).

Phase 1 of BC's Immunization Plan began in December 2020, and focused on priority populations including residents, staff, and essential visitors in LTC and AL settings, as well as individuals awaiting placement in LTC. As of February 15, 2021, eligible staff and residents in all LTC and AL facilities have been vaccinated with their first dose, and several with their second dose. The research shows that within two to three weeks of receiving a first dose of vaccine, there is a pronounced drop in the number of cases among vaccinated individuals and a reduction in hospitalizations and deaths among those vaccinated. Active outbreaks in LTC and AL have significantly decreased since vaccinations began.

In acknowledgement of the increased level of protection provided by COVID-19 vaccination, and the impact of ongoing visitor restrictions on staff, residents, and families, the Ministry is directing the partial easing of visitor and other restrictions in LTC and seniors' AL at this time.

Beginning April 1, 2021 Long-Term Care and Seniors' Assisted Living operators are required to implement the following changes:

- Social visits are no longer limited to one designated family member or friend. Additional family members and friends are allowed with a maximum of two adult visitors at the same time.
- Every resident is entitled to regular, routine, frequent opportunities for social visitation, ensuring a minimum total of 60 minutes every week if desired.
- Residents may have more social visitors outdoors, in an appropriate location, and in alignment with current provincial health officer guidelines. Infection prevention and control measures (e.g., screening for signs and symptoms of illness prior to every visit, practicing hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette and wearing medical masks) must be followed.
- There are no longer restrictions on the location, frequency, or duration of visits, and visits can now take place in residents' rooms. Any limitations on frequency and duration of visitation should be by exception only and specifically to meet WorkSafe BC Safety Plans and facility site safety plans

- Physical touch between residents and their visitors is now allowed with infection prevention and control measures in place.

Other practice requirements for social visitation remain in place, including:

- Social visits must be scheduled in advance and tracked for the purpose of contact tracing.
- Visitors are required to be screened, practice hand hygiene, wear a medical mask, and adhere to physical distancing requirements in the facility other than with the resident they are visiting.
- Facilities will continue to adhere to a written plan for visitation with dedicated staff to support safe visits.
- The essential visitor policy remains in place as per existing guidelines.

Further guidance for safe essential and social visitation practices is available in the attached *Overview of Visitors in Long-Term Care and Seniors' Assisted Living* (http://www.bccdc.ca/Health-Info-Site/Documents/Visitors_Long-Term_Care_Seniors_Assisted_Living.pdf). This document will be posted to the BC Centre for Disease Control and Ministry of Health Websites this week, replacing the previous guidance, to reflect the changes coming into effect April 1, 2021. [insert HA name] will also be updating the guidance on our website.

Additionally, to increase the quality of life for individuals residing in LTC and AL facilities health authorities and operators are directed to:

- Remove the requirements for physical distancing between residents to enable communal dining and small group recreational activities within the facility, as well as group outings such as bus trips.
- Enable residents to go on appropriate (i.e., in accordance with general public health guidance) outings with family and friends. Outings are no longer limited to medically necessary appointments and do not require isolation upon return to the facility.

Furthermore, in support of a smooth and successful transition for residents into LTC or AL, health authorities and operators are advised to implement the following b **April 1, 2021**:

- Remove the requirement for new residents to undergo a 14-day isolation upon admission to a LTC home or AL residence.
- Health authorities and operators will proactively determine resident vaccination status and offer vaccine to the new resident at the earliest opportunity.

The Ministry, in collaboration with the PHO, regional health authorities and key stakeholders, will continue to adapt the visitor policies and other COVID-19 response measures based on the evolving trends of community transmission, impact of COVID-19 variants, and progress of BC's Immunization Plan. I continue to commend your hard work to put necessary safety measures in place.