



Interior Health
Every person matters

March 27, 2020

To: Long Term Care Managers and Directors of Care
From: Dr. Sue Pollock, Interim Chief Medical Health Officer
Re: Medical Health Officer Requirements

We are writing to provide you with information about important new measures for staff and visitors that are now required by the Interior Health Medical Health Officer for all Long-term Care (LTC) Facilities in the Interior Health region. These measures are needed to prevent the introduction and spread of COVID-19 into your facility. Long-Term Care facility residents are amongst the highest risk of severe disease from COVID-19 infection, due to age and/or underlying health issues.

Staffing Measures

Staff with a fever, new or worse cough or other new onset of respiratory symptoms should not be working. Staff with mild symptoms should stay off work for 10 days after onset of their symptoms, and then may return to work if they are feeling better. Staff may return to work earlier if tested negative for COVID-19 and symptoms are resolved.

If no other staff are available, staff who are self-isolating and asymptomatic and are deemed essential, can return to work, but are required to self-monitor for symptoms for 14. They must wear a mask, eye shield/goggles and gloves while at work within patient care areas and avoid close contact with other staff for the same period. If symptoms develop they must immediately self isolate and call one of the IH testing sites to be screened and tested.

Infection Control Measures

We would also like to remind you of the following requirements outlined in the attached Medical Health Officers Order on **Infection Control Practices in Long-term Care Facilities** issued March 27, 2020.

Visitors

Although patients have a legal right to receive visitors, **in these extraordinary times we require you to limit visitation to essential visits only**, with the limited exception of the immediate family members of a resident who is clinically assessed to be at the end of his or her life and the spiritual advisor to this resident, in which case such individuals will be subject to enhanced screening for COVID-19.

Cleaning

Immediately begin enhanced cleaning of facilities and enhanced screening of staff, contractors, and visitors, in accordance with the guidance document issued by the BC Centre for Disease Control (“BCCDC”) which may be updated at any time, and in accordance with any additional direction which may be provided by an Interior Health Medical Health Officer (“MHO”). This BCCDC guidance document can be accessed on the BCCDC website at the following link:

<http://www.bccdc.ca/health-professionals/clinical-resources/covid-19-care/clinical-care/long-term-care-facilities-assisted-living>

Testing

- Swab **all residents** (to a maximum of 6 per facility/neighborhood) with new fever or new or worsening upper or lower respiratory symptoms, even if there is just a **single resident** who is ill. In most cases COVID-19 presents with respiratory symptoms and fever, and we recommend testing residents with symptoms which may be milder or atypical, including sore throat, shortness of breath and headache for this reason.
- The same throat and nasopharyngeal (NP) swabs used for influenza are used to test for COVID-19. While an NP swab (red COPAN) is preferred, a throat swab (blue COPAN) is also adequate.
- Follow the same processes for collecting and sending swabs as for influenza.

Isolation & Outbreak Protocols

- **Immediately isolate** all residents with new fever or new or worsening respiratory symptoms, even if there is just a **single resident** who is ill.
- Report to the MHO or designate immediately where one (1) incidence of an Influenza-Like Illness (“ILI”) or two (2) cases of mild respiratory illness are identified in residents or staff at the LTCF. Reports must be submitted over the phone by calling **1-866-778-7736** during Regular Work Hours or **1-866-457-5648** outside of Regular Work Hours.
- If a resident is diagnosed with COVID-19, Interior Health will follow up immediately with the facility to assist in management and contact tracing. Residents with a diagnosis of COVID-19 do not need to be moved to acute care unless their clinical status requires it; please contact the CD Unit at **1-866-778-7736** or the Medical Health Officer on Call at **1-866-457-5648** prior to transfer of any COVID-19 patient.

Additional Infection Control Practices

- Cancel or postpone indefinitely all group social activities within the LTCF and any planned community social activities.
- Review infection control procedures, including hand hygiene, with all staff. Maintaining appropriate infection control practices is critical to limiting the spread of COVID-19 within your facility.
- Current evidence strongly suggests COVID-19 is spread by droplets and direct contact. Please see

B.C. Centre for Disease Control's website for provincial infection control guidance, including the appropriate personal protective equipment when caring for a person with COVID-19 or a person under investigation for COVID-19: [www.bccdc.ca/health-professionals/clinical-resources/novel-coronavirus-\(covid-19\)](http://www.bccdc.ca/health-professionals/clinical-resources/novel-coronavirus-(covid-19))

- We also recommend providing continuous guidance to residents on respiratory hygiene/cough etiquette and hand-washing.
- Because current evidence does not suggest that COVID-19 has airborne spread, N95 masks should not be routinely required unless a patient is undergoing aerosol generating medical procedures. Where possible residents should be converted to metered dose inhalers (MDI) with spacers as opposed to nebulizers.

Supplies

We ask that you work with your existing suppliers to obtain supplies of personal protective equipment, including masks, and other relevant items.

Additional Information

BC Centre for Disease Control: [www.bccdc.ca/health-professionals/clinical-resources/novel-coronavirus-\(covid-19\)](http://www.bccdc.ca/health-professionals/clinical-resources/novel-coronavirus-(covid-19))

Interior Health: <https://news.interiorhealth.ca/covid-19/>

Public Health Agency of Canada: www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection.html

Definition of affected area: www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/health-professionals/covid-19-affected-areas-list.html