

July 14, 2021

Dear Operators,

Beginning in March 2020, restrictions on visitation practices have been in place in long-term care homes and seniors' assisted living residences in BC to protect those most vulnerable to serious illness from COVID-19. As the province continues to respond and manage the COVID-19 pandemic in BC, restrictions and interim policy amendments have been revised based on transmission trends in the province, vaccination rates, as well as system, resident, and family impacts.

Active outbreaks in long-term care and seniors' assisted living have significantly decreased since vaccination began in December 2020. Substantial progress on BC's *Immunization Plan* has also resulted in declining rates of community transmission, hospitalizations and mortality rates across the province leading to BC entering Step 3 of the *Restart Plan* on July 1, 2021.

Given this it is an appropriate time to further ease restrictions long-term care and seniors' assisted living settings. The Ministry, in consultation with the Public Health Officer and health authorities, has determined that further easing of visitation practices may occur. Health authorities are advised of the following practice changes to visitation, effective July 19, 2021:

- Remove the requirement to schedule visits in advance, allowing visitation to occur during designated visiting hours at a facility;
- Remove the limit on the number of visitors and allow visitation in alignment with site capacity to support resident needs and wellbeing through meaningful visits;
- Facility-wide indoor social and recreational events/gatherings may occur involving residents and staff from multiple units/floors of a facility; and
- Outdoor social events (e.g., summer barbeque) may resume and include staff, residents, and visitors in alignment with the current Provincial Health Officer guidance while adhering to applicable infection prevention and control practices to ensure the safety of all staff, residents, and visitors.

As a protective measure to reduce the risk for introduction and spread of COVID-19, it strongly recommended that visitors are **fully immunized against COVID-19 and provide proof of vaccination** prior to entering the facility. Operators will be expected to maintain a list of visitor vaccination status and provide to public health if required.

- Fully immunized visitors will be required to wear a medical mask while moving through the facility and in common areas but are not required to wear a mask while in direct contact with the person they are visiting.
- Visitors who do not demonstrate they are fully immunized are required to wear a medical mask for the duration of their visit, including when in direct contact with the person they are visiting.

The detailed updated guidance for visitation will be posted on the BCCDC website by July 19, 2021 ([http://www.bccdc.ca/Health-Info-Site/Documents/Visitors Long-Term Care Seniors Assisted Living.pdf](http://www.bccdc.ca/Health-Info-Site/Documents/Visitors_Long-Term_Care_Seniors_Assisted_Living.pdf)).

In addition, health authorities are advised that the utilization of non-essential **volunteers** in long term care and seniors' assisted living may now resume if the following criteria is met:

- All volunteers are required to be **fully immunized against COVID-19 and provide proof of vaccination**
- All volunteers are familiar with the responsibilities and expectations regarding outbreak prevention, detection, and management in the facility.

In the event of a COVID-19 outbreak at a facility, volunteers will be restricted to essential volunteers only.

In-person tours of facilities for potential residents may also resume, provided all infection prevention and control measures are followed, including individuals wearing a medical mask for the duration of the tour.

The further easing of restrictions is intended to recognize the increased level of protection provided by COVID-19 vaccination, along with the ongoing system, client, and family impacts of restrictions. Enhanced cleaning, screening, and reporting requirements continue as per the *Infection Prevention and Control Requirements for COVID-19 in Long-Term Care and Seniors' Assisted Living* ([http://www.bccdc.ca/Health-Info-Site/Documents/COVID19\\_LongTermCareAssistedLiving.pdf](http://www.bccdc.ca/Health-Info-Site/Documents/COVID19_LongTermCareAssistedLiving.pdf) ).

During an active outbreak, processes related to visitation and volunteers will be in alignment with the *COVID-19: Outbreak Management Protocol for Acute Care, Long-Term Care, and Seniors' Assisted Living* ([http://www.bccdc.ca/Health-Professionals-Site/Documents/COVID-19\\_Provincial\\_Outbreak\\_Management\\_Protocol\\_LTC.pdf](http://www.bccdc.ca/Health-Professionals-Site/Documents/COVID-19_Provincial_Outbreak_Management_Protocol_LTC.pdf)).

As we move through the next phase of our pandemic in BC and begin BC's restart, Ministry staff will continue to engage with health authority home and community care leads to discuss issues and provide direction and advice in response to the situation as it evolves.

Sincerely,

**Jo-Ann Tait**

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