

March 15, 2021

MEMO TO: Long-Term Care Home Licensees

FROM: Erin Hannah
Associate Deputy Minister

SUBJECT: Updated Direction on the Rapid Antigen Screening Program

As you know, all LTC homes were to transition to the use of antigen tests by March 15th, consistent with the Minister's Directive: COVID-19: Long-Term Care Home Surveillance Testing and Access to Homes.

Since the initial direction released in January 2021, homes have worked towards implementation, sharing best practices among peers and providing ongoing feedback to the ministry. Your efforts are greatly appreciated and have helped to inform refinements to the program to support the effectiveness of antigen testing as another protective tool for homes, as well as successful operationalization. Today, we are sharing the latest steps we have taken to evolve the program direction to reflect both recent changes to testing guidance and continuous feedback from homes.

Going forward, homes can choose one of two options for surveillance testing of staff, caregivers, students and volunteers based on what will work best in their home:

- An antigen test at a frequency set out in the [Ministry of Health COVID-19 Guidance: Considerations for Antigen Point-of-Care Testing](#), at a minimum (i.e., currently antigen testing 2-3 times per week for yellow/orange/red/grey zones and 1-2 times per week in the green zone); or,
- 1 PCR (polymerase chain reaction) and 1 antigen test per week (i.e., other homes, for example those experiencing significant staffing challenges or with fast turnaround times for PCR testing, may use this alternate model that was previously reserved for rural, remote and northern communities).

Support workers and general visitors (where permitted) are still required to undergo a “day of” antigen test unless they were tested the previous day (i.e., a negative antigen test result is valid for 2 days). For those support workers and general visitors being tested, the result must be obtained before gaining entry to the home unless the support worker is a Regulated Health Professional.

In addition to the frequency changes, caregivers are permitted to proceed to the resident’s room with appropriate PPE pending test results to fully align with the approach for staff, students and volunteers. We encourage homes to continue approaches that help caregivers, in addition to staff, students and volunteers, understand and follow infection prevention and control practices, including appropriate donning and doffing of PPE, hand hygiene, and physical distancing where possible.

The objective of the screening program remains the same – to protect Ontario’s most vulnerable residents from COVID-19 by decreasing the opportunities for the virus to enter LTC homes. These updates to the program are minimum requirements and provide you with the best ability to put in place a surveillance program that is most well-suited to protecting the residents and staff in your home(s).

I would like to remind homes that antigen tests can now be performed by a trained individual or can be done using supervised self-swabbing. If you are choosing to use health professionals to perform antigen testing, recruitment support is available through Ontario Health (Health Force). Support can be requested by emailing info-hfo@ontariohealth.ca.

We have updated the Minister’s Directive and FAQs to reflect these changes and we have set up a Q&A session hosted by the ministry in partnership with Ontario Health on Wednesday, March 17th at 1pm. You can [register here](#) for this session. We have also attached a fact sheet for your use. Should you have questions that are not answered in the FAQs, Q&A session or fact sheet, you may contact us at MLTCPandemicResponse@ontario.ca.

The ministry continues to work closely with the Ministry of Health and government expert advisors as new evidence related to COVID-19 becomes available and remains committed to evolving pandemic-related requirements where possible. We are attuned to the strong desire of residents and families, as well as staff, to move towards a new normal.

As always, our continued thanks to you and your teams for your dedication to protecting the people who live, visit and work in our long-term care homes.

Sincerely,

Original signed by

Erin Hannah

Attachments:

Minister's Directive: COVID-19: Long-Term Care Home Surveillance Testing and Access to Homes, effective March 15, 2021

Updated FAQ's Enhancing Protection for Long-Term Care Homes
Fact Sheet (New)

c: Richard Steele, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Long-Term Care (MLTC)
Dr. David Williams, Chief Medical Officer of Health
Dr. Barbara Yaffe, Associate Chief Medical Officer of Health
Alison Blair, Associate Deputy Minister, Pandemic Response and Recovery Division, Ministry of Health (MOH)
Melissa Thomson, Assistant Deputy Minister, MOH
Michael Hillmer, Assistant Deputy Minister, Capacity Planning and Analytics Division, MOH/MLTC
Lisa Levin, Chief Executive Officer, AdvantAge Ontario
Donna Duncan, Chief Executive Officer, Ontario Long Term Care Association
Monika Turner, Association of Municipalities of Ontario
Michael Jacek, Association of Municipalities of Ontario
Colleen Geiger, President and CEO (Acting), Public Health Ontario
Jeff Butler, Assistant Deputy Minister, LTC Pandemic Response, MLTC
Sheila Bristo, Assistant Deputy Minister, Operations, MLTC