

**Ministry of Long-Term Care**

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June 16, 2021

**MEMO TO:** Long-Term Care Home Licensees  
Retirement Home Licensees  
Boards of Health / Public Health Units

**FROM:** Erin Hannah, Associate Deputy Minister, LTC Pandemic Response  
Alison Blair, Associate Deputy Minister, Pandemic Response and  
Recovery  
Jacqueline Cureton, Assistant Deputy Minister, Policy Programs  
and Strategic Partnerships

**SUBJECT:** Vaccine Maintenance Strategy for Long-Term Care and Retirement  
Homes

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We want to extend our sincerest congratulations for the extremely successful long-term care (LTC) home and retirement home vaccination campaign to date. Thanks to the efforts of public health units (PHUs), community partners, LTC homes and retirement homes, virtually all residents are now fully immunized. In addition, virtually all essential caregivers in both LTC and retirement homes have received at least one dose, as have an estimated 90% of LTC home staff and 73% of retirement home staff.

Notwithstanding the progress that has been made, we continue to see variability in vaccination uptake at the home level, particularly among staff, with some homes significantly below the provincial averages. Both access to vaccine and vaccine hesitancy continue to pose challenges to increasing staff vaccination rates. In addition, addressing the needs of incoming residents, staff members, and staff/caregivers requiring their second dose is becoming increasingly challenging for PHUs to address due to the significant resource needs involved in sending mobile teams to homes and serving all other priority populations.

In an effort to decrease these barriers and help drive vaccination rates as close to 100% as possible, our ministries have worked together to facilitate improved access to vaccines in homes, through the development of a maintenance strategy that supports the readiness of LTC and retirement homes to administer vaccines directly to their residents, staff, and essential caregivers wherever possible. The strategy is built on best practices some PHUs have already put in place and aims to:

- Recognize and increase capacity within LTC and retirement homes to administer COVID-19 vaccines independently
- Decrease barriers to vaccine access
- Achieve and maintain a high coverage rate for residents, staff and essential caregivers in homes
- Improve confidence in the COVID-19 vaccination program, and
- Build the foundation for COVID-19 vaccines to be given routinely within homes.

Broadly speaking, the plan envisions:

- PHUs working with LTC and retirement homes, as well as other community and health partners as needed, on an approach for independent administration of vaccines by LTC and retirement homes, where the home indicates interest and capacity to do so.
- PHUs continuing to support homes who are not able to independently administer vaccine through alternative approaches to ensure continued access to vaccine doses (e.g., mobile/onsite clinics, hub model, etc.).

To support PHUs, LTC and retirement homes to implement this strategy, the ministries have developed an Onboarding and Readiness Toolkit that includes guidance on program planning and governance, communication protocols, logistics and oversight, vaccine storage, IT requirements, data reporting, and clinical guidance, among other topics. We are also sharing helpful resources developed by some of your colleagues across the province who have started implementing this or a similar approach, and who we thank for generously sharing their experience and tools with all of us.

If you have not already done so, we are requesting that PHUs work with LTC and retirement homes in their communities to determine which homes have the interest and capacity to independently administer COVID-19 vaccines, and begin working on a local maintenance strategy with these homes, in collaboration with other health and community partners if applicable. It is recognized that some PHUs have already implemented this strategy or one very similar and no change is being requested in these instances.

As always, the ministries are available to support homes and PHUs directly should they have any questions related to this memo:

- For MLTC-specific questions: [MLTCPandemicResponse@ontario.ca](mailto:MLTCPandemicResponse@ontario.ca)
- For MSAA-specific questions: [RHInquiries@ontario.ca](mailto:RHInquiries@ontario.ca)
- For MoH-specific questions: [covid.immunization@ontario.ca](mailto:covid.immunization@ontario.ca)

Sincerely,

*Original signed by*

*Original signed by*

*Original signed by*

Erin Hannah

Alison Blair

Jacqueline Cureton

Attachments (3): Onboarding Package; Protocol Readiness Assessment Checklist;  
Additional resources

- c: Richard Steele, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Long-Term Care (MLTC)  
Helen Angus, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Health (MOH)  
Denise A. Cole, Deputy Minister, Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility  
Dr. David Williams, Chief Medical Officer of Health  
Dr. Barbara Yaffe, Associate Chief Medical Officer of Health  
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Jay O'Neill, Chief Executive Officer and Registrar, Retirement Homes Regulatory  
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Donna Duncan, Chief Executive Officer, Ontario Long Term Care Association  
Cathy Hecimovich, Chief Executive Officer, Ontario Retirement Communities  
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Monika Turner, Association of Municipalities of Ontario  
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