

March 8, 2021

MEMO TO: Long-Term Care Home Licensees

FROM: Erin Hannah
Associate Deputy Minister

SUBJECT: Updates on Vaccines, Antigen Testing, and IPAC/PPE

We continue to see increased uptake in the number of residents and staff who have been able to receive their vaccinations as more supply has become available. I am pleased to share that we estimate over 95% of long-term care residents have received at least one dose and about 80% are fully immunized. In addition, we estimate over 67% of staff have received at least one dose, and more than 28,000 essential caregivers have also received at least one dose. Vaccination of staff and essential caregivers in long-term care continues to be a priority and I know you are all working incredibly hard to help those numbers continue to climb.

In the context of this excellent progress, we know the importance of ongoing vigilance with public health measures, ensuring strong infection prevention and control (IPAC) practices, and leveraging the other available tools such as antigen testing in the best way possible. To this end, I am sharing the following updates and reminders on available resources.

Updated Vaccine Dose Intervals

Today, Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health, Dr. David Williams, confirmed the province will be following the latest recommendations from the National Advisory Council on Immunization (NACI) to extend the time interval between the first and second vaccine doses up to 16 weeks for all three vaccines (Moderna, Pfizer-BioNTech, and Astra Zeneca/COVISHIELD) in an effort to ensure as many Ontarians as possible can benefit from the protection of a first vaccine dose. The extension to the vaccine program will go into effect on March 10th, 2021. Essential caregivers and staff of long-term care homes will now receive their second vaccine dose at the updated 16-week interval. There will be no change in vaccine dosage timing for Ontarians that are deemed highest risk from COVID-19, including residents of long-term care homes, retirement homes and Assisted Living facilities. Dr. Williams' memo with full details on the vaccine program updates is attached.

Updated Guidance for Rapid Antigen Testing

The Ministry of Health has updated its guidance to allow for the use of voluntary supervised self-swabbing for the Abbott Panbio™ COVID-19 Antigen Rapid Test. Effective immediately long-term care homes can choose to collect specimens via supervised self-swabbing.

To support this change, the Ministry of Health, in collaboration with Ontario Health and Public Health Ontario, has developed publicly available [training](#). Additionally, the [Provincial Guidance](#) on Antigen Point-of-Care Testing has been updated to include specific information on supervised self-swabbing.

There have also been updates to regulations under the Laboratory and Specimen Collection Centre Licensing Act (LSCCLA) to exempt a person performing or collecting specimens for a COVID-19 test using a device authorized by Health Canada for point-of-care testing from the licensing requirements of the LSCCLA. This change means that rapid antigen testing no longer needs to be performed by a health professional and can be performed by anyone with appropriate training.

These two changes broaden the list of who can perform the tests, enabling greater flexibility for implementation and may help to reduce operational and human resource-related barriers that homes may be trying to find solutions for.

Infection Prevention & Control (IPAC) and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

As we plan for any potential future surge of COVID-19 cases, we continue to encourage homes to ensure strong IPAC measures are in place, including training, and to check that your supply of PPE is sufficient. I encourage homes to undertake a review of all IPAC procedures in your home and if you require support, reach out to your regional IPAC Hub.

As well, we continue to emphasize the need for responsible stewardship of PPE in alignment with Ontario Health guidance:

- Recommendations on the Use and Conservation of PPE Use ([linked here](#))
- Optimizing the Supply of Personal Protective Equipment ([linked here](#)).

As always, we greatly appreciate your continued commitment to do everything we can to keep our most vulnerable Ontarians safe during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sincerely,

Original signed by

Erin Hannah

Attachments: Ontario Chief Medical Officer of Health memo; Updated FAQ's Enhancing Protection for Long-Term Care Homes

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)
Michael Hillmer, Assistant Deputy Minister, Capacity Planning and Analytics
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Lisa Levin, Chief Executive Officer, AdvantAge Ontario
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Monika Turner, Association of Municipalities of Ontario
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