

**Ministry of Long-Term Care**

Office of the Associate Deputy  
Long-Term Care Pandemic  
Response

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**Ministère des Soins de longue durée**

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February 4, 2021

**MEMORANDUM TO:** Long-Term Care Home Licensees

**FROM:** Erin Hannah  
Associate Deputy Minister  
LTC Pandemic Response

**SUBJECT: Update: Enhancing the Protection for LTC Homes**

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I am writing today to provide an update on several fronts that are collectively aimed at protecting LTC homes and the people who live and work there.

**RAPID ANTIGEN TESTING**

First, we have received lots of thoughtful feedback about the communication on January 27<sup>th</sup> and the direction to transition to rapid antigen testing in LTC homes. I want to start by saying thank you to everyone who reached out directly and through associations to express support for the use of antigen tests and highlight key considerations about how to set the foundation for the successful implementation of rapid antigen testing in LTC homes.

Today we are communicating some refinements and clarifications to support the implementation, informed by your feedback and ideas, including additional flexibility for homes to adapt the program implementation to fit each home. The following reflects the current program approach:

**UPDATE: Timing of Antigen Tests**

For staff, students and volunteers, Antigen Tests should be performed as soon as practically possible once a shift has started. Individuals with a positive screening result will need to leave the home and seek a confirmatory PCR test within 24 hours.

For caregivers, support workers and general visitors (as permitted), the Antigen Test should be performed before contact with residents.

This approach will allow Antigen Tests to be leveraged as a tool for earlier identification of COVID-19.

## Frequency

The frequency of antigen testing remains unchanged. The Minister's Directive will be updated to reflect:

- Staff, student placements and volunteers who enter LTC homes two or more days in a 7-day period undergo Antigen Tests on non-consecutive days up to 3 times in the period as soon as possible after starting a shift (if attending only two times on consecutive days, apply "day of" testing).
- Staff, student placements and volunteers who enter LTC homes only once in a 7-day period undergo an Antigen Test on the "day of" as soon as possible after starting a shift.
- Caregivers, support workers and general visitors undergo an Antigen Test on the "day of" regardless of how many times they attend to a home in a 7-day period and before contact with residents.

## UPDATE: Rural, Remote and Northern Communities Exception

LTC homes in rural, remote communities and those in the far north will be able to adopt an alternative model for staff, student placements and volunteers in recognition of the unique or exacerbated challenges facing these communities (e.g., lower than average access to human resources). The alternative model will include:

- 1 PCR (lab-based or Abbott ID NOW™ COVID-19 Test) and 1 Antigen Test (Panbio™ COVID-19 Test) on separate days within a 7-day period no later than Feb. 22 (regardless of PHU region).
- For staff, students and volunteers who only attend the home once in a 7-day period, either of these tests would be acceptable.
- For caregivers, support workers and general visitors, an Antigen test would still be required "day of" regardless of how many times the individual presents at the home in a 7-day period.

As a guideline, LTC home licensees may consider the following characteristics for rural, remote and northern communities: a community with a population of less than 30,000, and a travel time that is greater than 30 minutes from a community with a population of more than 30,000; a community that is without year-round road access, or reliant on a third party (such as train, airplane or ferry) for transportation to a larger centre (source: Rural and Northern Health Care Framework/Plan, Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, 2011). Homes that wish to pursue this exemption should notify the ministry.

## Implementation Supports

A reminder that:

- Changes have been made to regulations under the *Laboratory and Specimen Collection Centre Licensing Act* (LSCCLA) to create a time-limited exemption that allows more health professionals to perform the Antigen Test, from swabbing

through to processing and communicating the screening result. This may include, for example, Personal Support Workers, Physician Assistants, Occupational Therapists, Registered Massage Therapists and others. A list of examples is included in Appendix 1 at the end of this memo.

- LTC home licensees should decide whether to operate the program directly with your own new or existing staff or contract with a willing local partner (e.g., a local pharmacy).
- The ministry continues to work towards a potential (optional) Vendors of Record (VoR) that LTC homes could use to connect to a willing service provider. We hope to provide further information on this effort soon however we encourage homes to proceed with planning and implementation as we continue to explore this possibility.
- Ontario Health has been providing training webinars on using the Panbio™ COVID-19 Test. The first webinar was held on January 12, 2021 and a [recording of the webinar](#) is available for viewing. Additional training webinars will be available (and recorded). Upcoming scheduled webinars:
  - Friday, February 5<sup>th</sup>, 1pm – **Training on how to run a Rapid Antigen Test program**, that will cover staff, materials and space required, how to collect and test samples, and how to interpret and document results. [Register here](#)
- The testing reporting tool has been updated along with the data definition guide and other resources to make self-reporting easier and more accurate. Webinars were offered on February 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>. Materials are posted to the Health Data Collection Service website under the Supporting Documentation section. It is critical that homes self-report so that we have a clear picture of how testing is helping to protect LTC homes. Reports should continue to be completed and submitted weekly (on Wednesdays).
- Updated Qs and As have been attached (Attachment 1) to reflect the refinements and clarifications to the Rapid Antigen Testing program direction.

## **UPDATE: Transition Timelines**

The timeline for adopting the new requirements are as follows:

- **For LTC Homes in:** Toronto Public Health, York Region Public Health Services, Peel Public Health, Windsor-Essex County Public Health Unit, Ottawa Public Health, Durham Region Health Department and Simcoe-Muskoka District Health Unit.
  - Start transition by February 8<sup>th</sup> by placing an order for Panbio™ test kits with Ontario Health, and
  - Ensure the program is running by February 16<sup>th</sup> by:
    - Offering “day of” Antigen Tests for caregivers, support workers and general visitors (once permitted) by the above date,
    - Initiating 1 weekly onsite Antigen Test for staff, students and volunteers by the end of February, and

- Increasing to 3 times a week for staff, students and volunteers as part of a transition to full operations by March 15<sup>th</sup>.
- **For LTC Homes in:** All other Public Health Units
  - Start transition by February 16<sup>th</sup> by placing an order for Panbio™, test kits with Ontario Health, and
  - Ensure the program is running by February 22<sup>nd</sup> by:
    - Offering “day of” Antigen Tests for caregivers, support workers and general visitors (once permitted) by the above date,
    - Initiating 1 weekly onsite Antigen Test for staff, students and volunteers by the end of February, and
    - Increasing to 3 times a week for staff, students and volunteers as part of a transition to full operations by March 15<sup>th</sup>.

LTC homes should continue with a once-a-week PCR test for staff, student placements and volunteers until such time as there is confidence the Rapid Antigen Testing program is running smoothly in the home.

LTC homes in outbreak should plan to implement the program within two to three weeks of an outbreak being resolved.

Once Rapid Antigen Testing programs are fully operational in LTC homes, PCR testing will continue to be used only in instances where individuals are symptomatic or have a positive antigen test result, individuals have been in contact of a confirmed COVID-19 case, a home is in outbreak, or as otherwise directive by local public health.

Lastly, I would like to note that Ontario’s Chief Medical Officer of Health has written to all Medical Officers of Health and Associate Medical Officers of Health in the 34 public health units across the province to note the important opportunity Antigen Tests provide for LTC homes. Please see Attachment 2 for a copy of Dr. Williams’ letter.

### **3<sup>RD</sup> PARTY OVERSIGHT**

Per the memo of January 25<sup>th</sup>, LTC homes have been asked to ensure 3<sup>rd</sup> party oversight of the PCR testing confirmation and active screening. The specifics of this program have evolved over the past several weeks and we know that clarity has been requested. To that end, please note the following:

- LTC homes may use a vendor of their own choosing or may use a dedicated hire of their own.
- Vendor arrangements and dedicated hires are acceptable regardless of how long these have been in place.
- Individuals performing the oversight function can be coupled with existing staff who have been trained to assist with confirming PCR testing and active screening.
- Individuals do not need to be security personnel and/or uniformed personnel.

## **VACCINATION PROGRAM**

As you know, vaccination continues to be a critical opportunity for addressing COVID-19, and Ontario is working to ensure that vaccines are made available to all residents, staff and essential caregivers in our long-term care (LTC) homes as a phase one priority.

We have made excellent progress together despite the recent changes to Canada's supply of Pfizer in particular. As of January 31<sup>st</sup>, based on the centralized provincial reporting tool used to track vaccination progress, over 82,000 LTC home residents, staff and caregivers have received a first dose vaccine.

Yesterday the government confirmed its goal of offering first vaccine doses to all **LTC, high-risk retirement, and First Nations elder care residents** across Ontario by February 10<sup>th</sup> based on the most up to date supply information.

In response to the allocation reductions, second vaccine doses will also continue to be provided but according to a modified dose interval for people who are not residents.

For clarity, and consistent with the advice of the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI), the following applies:

### **Pfizer-BioNT**

- Maintain the recommended maximum interval of 21-27 days for long-term care, retirement and First Nations elder care home residents.
- For all vaccine recipients other than residents of long-term care, high-risk retirement and First Nations elder care homes who already received their first dose the interval will be 35 days, and no later than 42 days.

### **Moderna**

- Maintain 28-day interval for those who have already received their first dose.

We know that despite good progress, vaccine hesitancy remains a concern. That is why we are taking steps on a variety of fronts to overcome hesitancy and promote uptake of the vaccine in the LTC sector. Attached for your use is information to support your communications. The document contains information about the new COVID-19 vaccines, plus links for more background. We are translating this document into additional languages and will share these on LTC.net as soon as they are ready.

## **IPAC AND PUBLIC HEALTH MEASURES**

With new variants of concern confirmed in Ontario, we are all seized with the importance of strong infection prevention and control (IPAC) measures, and vigilance with respect to public health measures including frequent hand hygiene, active screening, universal masking, physical distancing and enhanced environmental cleaning the increased reports of highly contagious variants of COVID-19.

Public Health Ontario has developed a [checklist](#) to support homes in reviewing the importance of Routine Practices and Additional Precautions with your staff. We appreciate the efforts you make each day and encourage the continued commitment to promote knowledge among staff, caregivers and others in the home about safe practices and requirements.

## **ACCESSING PROVINCIAL PPE SUPPLY**

As part of Ontario's Fall Preparedness Plan, the government committed to provide all long-term care (LTC) homes with an up to eight-week supply of PPE at no cost to homes.

If your home has not yet accessed PPE under this initiative, I encourage you to do so. As a reminder and for your convenience, a description of the various programs is included in Appendix 2 at the end of this memo along with regional supply lead contacts. Please [click here](#) to access the online portal to request access to the programs.

In closing, I hope this information has been clear and helpful to you as you continue your important work to provide a safe home to so many people across the province. Should you have any questions please contact Renee Mahalanobis, Director, Long-Term Care Projects and Stabilization in my office at [renee.mahalanobis@ontario.ca](mailto:renee.mahalanobis@ontario.ca).

I reiterate my thanks for 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

- c: Richard Steele, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Long-Term Care (MLTC)  
Sheila Bristo, Assistant Deputy Minister, Long-Term Care Operations Division, 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 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  
Renee Mahalanobis, Director, Long-Term Care Projects and Stabilization, MLTC

## **APPENDIX 1: Examples of who can perform all aspects of the Panbio™ Test**

Health professionals may include both [\*regulated health professionals\*](#), as well as non-regulated health professionals, which could include, but are not limited to (active or retired):

- Personal support workers
- Physician assistants
- Physiotherapy assistants
- Speech language therapists
- Osteopaths

## APPENDIX 2: PPE SUPPLY PROGRAMS AND REGIONAL SUPPLE LEAD CONTACTS

**Full PPE Supply Program:** LTC homes can submit a request to receive the following products:

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|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Wipes</li><li>• Face Shields (both disposable and reusable)</li><li>• L2-4 Gowns (both disposable and reusable)</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Gloves</li><li>• Hand Sanitizer</li><li>• Reusable Elastomeric Respirators</li><li>• L2 Surgical Masks</li></ul> |
|---|--|

**N95 Supply Program:** LTC homes can also request a full eight-week supply of the following N95 respiratory masks: Halyard Fluidshield 46727, 46827 and 3M 8210. An eight-week supply of these specific N95 models is available to all homes, regardless of whether they previously requested other types of PPE through the ministry's program. While the province will endeavor to fulfill orders for this N95 top-up as quickly as possible, shipments will be prioritized for homes in outbreak and those where there is high community transmission of COVID-19.

**Provincially Coordinated Fit-Testing Supports:** Provincially coordinated N95 fit-testing supports for LTC homes are also available.

In addition to the above PPE supports, all LTC homes can submit emergency escalation requests of PPE; when PPE is in short supply at a home, the Province will top-up PPE supplies in emergency situations and fulfil priority requests for PPE within 24 hours.

If you have any questions about the PPE programs described above, please contact your Regional Supply Chain (RSC) Lead:

### Central Region

Susan Gibb:  
[OHCentralPPEinquiries@lhins.on.ca](mailto:OHCentralPPEinquiries@lhins.on.ca)

Debbie Robers:  
[Debbie.Roberts@lhins.on.ca](mailto:Debbie.Roberts@lhins.on.ca)

### East Region

Paul McAuley:  
[Paul.McAuley@3so.ca](mailto:Paul.McAuley@3so.ca)

Shelley Moneta:  
[Shelley.Moneta@lhins.on.ca](mailto:Shelley.Moneta@lhins.on.ca)

### West Region

Toby O'Hara:  
[HMMSCoVID19@hmms.on.ca](mailto:HMMSCoVID19@hmms.on.ca)

### North Region

Matthew Saj:  
[COVIDsuppliesNorth@tbh.net](mailto:COVIDsuppliesNorth@tbh.net)

Michael Giardetti:  
[giardetm@tbh.net](mailto:giardetm@tbh.net)

### Toronto Region

Rob Burgess:  
[Robert.Burgess@sunnybrook.ca](mailto:Robert.Burgess@sunnybrook.ca)

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