



HOMES AND SENIORS SERVICES

POLICY & PROCEDURE NUMBER: 1.35

DEPARTMENT: Administration

SUBJECT: *Visitors and Resident Absences During a Pandemic*

APPROVAL DATE: September 2020

REVISION DATE: February 2021; October 2021; January 2022; March 2022; May 2022; Oct. 2022; November 2022

Page 1 of 11

POLICY:

During a pandemic (e.g. COVID-19), visits to the Home, and absences from the Home, will be guided by ministry directives/guidance documents, Fixing Long-Term Care Act, 2021 and related legislation, and local/regional public health unit guidance (including consideration to local disease transmission and activity).

PURPOSE:

To provide opportunities for visitors to attend the Home, and residents to leave the Home, as permitted, while ensuring the safety of residents and staff during a pandemic.

Guiding Principles:

This policy is guided by the following principles:

- **Safety** – Any approach to visiting must balance the health and safety needs of residents, staff, and visitors, and ensure risks are mitigated.
- **Emotional Well-Being** – Allowing visitors is intended to support the emotional well-being of residents by reducing any potential negative impacts related to social isolation.
- **Equitable Access** – All residents must be given equitable access to receive visitors, consistent with their preferences and within reasonable restrictions that safeguard residents.
- **Flexibility** – The physical/infrastructure characteristics of the home, its staffing availability, whether the home is in an outbreak and the current status of the home with respect to personal protective equipment (PPE) are all variables considered in the development of this policy.
- **Equality** – Residents have the right to choose their visitors. In addition, residents and/or their substitute decision-makers have the right to designate caregivers.

Visitors should consider their personal health and susceptibility to the virus in determining whether visiting a LTC home is appropriate. Homes will screen visitors as per ministry and/or public health directives; this documentation must be maintained for thirty (30) days and shall include at minimum, the name and contact information of the visitor, the time and date of the visit; and the name of the resident visited.



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Page 2 of 11

PROCEDURE:

1. Short Stay Absence Guidelines:

All short stay absences will be subject to ministry/legislative requirements and/or public health direction. This may include requirements for frequency of rapid testing, PCR testing and isolation.

- Essential medical or compassionate absences will be permitted.
- All residents may leave the Home's property for a short stay absence for social reasons regardless of vaccination status
- Does not include overnight stay, with the exception of a single-night emergency room visit
- The Home requests that short stay absences be communicated to the Home in advance of the absence. For a risk assessment to be completed, it is recommended/encouraged this communication include the nature of the absence, the date of the absence, duration, the location(s) where the resident will be going; and the individuals the resident will be interacting with
- If the planned absence is deemed to put the resident at risk for exposure, the family member/friend will be encouraged to make alternative arrangements for the short stay absence
- For those residents capable of making their own decisions regarding a short stay absence, the resident must agree to the absence
- All family members or friends must self-screen for COVID-19 symptoms prior to picking up the resident. If family members/friends fail the self-screen, the outing must be rescheduled
- It is recommended/encouraged that resident social absences are limited to those with fully vaccinated (up to date) attendees
- Family member(s)/friend(s) arriving at the Home will be actively screened and rapid antigen tested prior to the commencement of a short stay absence
- Once the family member(s)/friend(s) have passed active screening and rapid testing, the resident will be brought to the front entrance/lobby by Home staff/the visitor
- Any individual who is unable to show proof of vaccination and is taking the resident out will be required to participate in rapid antigen testing with a negative result prior to the outing.
- Resident must pass active screening prior to leaving the Home for a short stay absence



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APPROVAL DATE: September 2020

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Page 3 of 11

-
- Resident must be provided with a medical mask to be worn at all times when outside of the home (if tolerated)
 - Medications provided as per pharmacy leave of absence policy
 - Residents, family and friends are to be reminded about the importance of public health measures including physical distancing, hand hygiene, mask etiquette, respiratory etiquette, social circles, indoor capacity limits, etc.
 - Upon return to the home, the resident must be actively screened but is not required to self-isolate (unless any high-risk activity/symptoms/known exposure during short stay absence)
 - Any resident returning from a social, medical, and/or compassionate absence will be required to complete rapid testing, PCR testing and isolation as per ministry/legislative requirements and/or public health direction
 - The Home reserves the right to cancel any future requests for short stay absences should it be deemed that the resident and/or the responsible family member are not following public health/ministry standards which potentially puts the resident at risk for exposure until such time as additional education is provided and agreement to compliance with required IPAC measures
 - Short stay absences will be cancelled in the event of an outbreak at the Home and/or as per ministry/public health direction

2. Temporary Absence Guidelines:

- Temporary overnight absences for social purposes are permitted for all residents regardless of vaccination status
- Residents returning from essential, medical or compassionate absences will follow all applicable screening, testing and isolation requirements
- Residents may leave the Home's property for a temporary absence (one or more nights) for personal reasons
- Temporary absences must be pre-arranged/scheduled in advance of the absence; and must include the nature of the absence, the date of departure, duration, location(s) where the resident will be going; and the individuals the resident will be interacting with
- If the planned absence is deemed to put the resident at risk for exposure, the family member/friend will be encouraged to make alternative arrangements for the temporary overnight absence
- Medications provided as per pharmacy leave of absence policy



HOMES AND SENIORS SERVICES

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APPROVAL DATE: September 2020

REVISION DATE: February 2021; October 2021; January 2022; March 2022; May 2022; Oct. 2022; November 2022

Page 4 of 11

- If the Home denies a temporary absence request, the Home will communicate to the resident/substitute decision maker in writing, including the rationale for the decision
- For those residents capable of making their own decisions regarding a temporary absence, the resident must agree to the absence, and the applicable self-isolation upon return to the Home
- All family members or friends must self-screen for COVID-19 symptoms prior to picking up the resident. If family members/friends fail the self-screen, the outing must be rescheduled
- Any individual who is unable to show proof of vaccination and is taking the resident out will be required to participate in rapid antigen testing with a negative result prior to the outing.
- Resident must pass active screening prior to leaving the Home for a temporary absence
- Resident must be provided with a medical mask to be worn at all times when outside of the home (if tolerated). Family members will be required to provide additional personal protective equipment as required during the temporary absence
- Residents, family and friends are to be reminded about the importance of public health measures including physical distancing, hand hygiene, mask etiquette, respiratory etiquette, social circles, etc.
- Upon return to the home, the resident must be actively screened and the resident will be required to self-isolate for the applicable timeframe as per applicable ministry/public health direction/guidance
- The resident will be required to be tested for COVID-19 as per ministry directives/public health guidelines, upon return from the temporary absence (or upon return to the Home if the resident is symptomatic/known exposure during temporary absence)
- The Home reserves the right to cancel any future requests for temporary absences should it be deemed that the resident and/or the responsible family member are not following public health/ministry standards which potentially puts the resident at risk for exposure until such time as additional education is provided and agreement to compliance with required IPAC measures
- Temporary absences will be cancelled in the event of an outbreak at the Home and/or as per ministry/public health direction
- See Algorithm Admission and Transfer Algorithm “COVID-19 Guidance: Long-Term Care Homes, Retirement Homes, and Other Congregate Living Settings for Public Health Units; MOH; October 2022” or most recent as continues to be updated.

3. Visiting Guidelines:

- Effective March 14, 2022, the Ministry of Long-Term Care shifted from a provincial directive that requires Homes to have a mandatory vaccination policy to a guidance-based approach that continues to support homes with their employer-led policies and best



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APPROVAL DATE: September 2020

REVISION DATE: February 2021; October 2021; January 2022; March 2022; May 2022; Oct. 2022; November 2022

Page 5 of 11

practices. This shift does not change the critical importance of vaccination as a key defense against COVID-19. All visitors are encouraged to get vaccinated, including receiving medically recommended boosters. This is particularly important for long-term care home residents to ensure they have the greatest level of immune protection possible.

- Effective March 14, 2022, all essential caregivers and general visitors are permitted to visit indoors provided they meet the long-term care homes vaccination policy requirements.
- Effective March 23, 2022, all visitors to the Home are required to provide proof of having received two (2) doses of an approved COVID-19 vaccine; or, proof of a valid medical contraindication prior to entering the Home to visit (with the exception of children under age of 5 who are currently not eligible for COVID-19 vaccination)
- Outdoor visitors do not require proof of vaccination to visit. There are no limits to the number of visitors for outdoor visits based on available outdoor spaces.
- The number of indoor visitors (general visitors and/or essential caregivers/resident) at a time is determined by each Home in accordance with available space and applicable guidance and laws (exception for palliative residents for which there are no limits to caregiver visitors provided that physical distancing can be achieved; and, subject to public health outbreak guidance).
- Visitor limits will be as directed by Ministry legislation/Chief Medical Officer of Health directives/public health direction
- Cohorting continues to be required for dining activities.
- Social group activities can be increased in size (i.e. more than 10) while larger social group activities where potential crowding can occur should continue to be avoided, and IPAC measures should continue to be followed by residents and visitors to promote safety and wellbeing (e.g. masking, distancing, etc.)
- Proof of vaccination and/or valid medical exemption is required prior to entry to the Home.
- Visitors who are entering the Home to visit a resident receiving end of life care must still be screened and rapid antigen tested but will be permitted to enter the Home regardless of vaccination status and prior to receiving the rapid antigen test result(s). Should a palliative resident visitor test positive for COVID-19, they will work with the IPAC lead to implement required/recommended precautions
- Eating and drinking by visitors on site is not currently permitted. Exception - a vaccinated visitor may remove their mask to eat/drink in a resident room, provided that he/she is alone with the resident in the resident room. The visitor must reapply their mask should another visitor, a staff member or another resident enter the resident room.
- Visits will be made available according to local/regional public health and provincial ministry guidelines/direction and will be offered equitably to all residents
- Types of visits, when permitted, may include: virtual and indoor; window and outdoor (where feasible),



HOMES AND SENIORS SERVICES

POLICY & PROCEDURE NUMBER: 1.35

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SUBJECT: *Visitors and Resident Absences During a Pandemic*

APPROVAL DATE: September 2020

REVISION DATE: February 2021; October 2021; January 2022; March 2022; May 2022; Oct. 2022; November 2022

Page 6 of 11

-
- Homes have the discretion to determine where visits may be held (e.g. dedicated outdoor area, inside the resident's room, specified indoor area, etc.). In determining the location of visits, Homes will consider:
 - Staffing capacity for transferring residents into and out of the visiting location, and escorting visitors to the visiting location if required
 - Space available in the location for physical distancing
 - Weather forecast and resident status
 - Visitors are encouraged to visit one resident only and to limit interaction with other residents/visitors of the Home
 - Visitors are provided with Infection Prevention and Control (IPAC) education on hand hygiene, physical distancing, number of visitors permitted, mask etiquette, personal protective equipment as required by public health/ministry guidance
 - A vaccinated visitor may remove their mask provided that they are alone with the resident in the resident room. The visitor must reapply their mask should another visitor, a staff member or another resident enter the resident room.
 - Visitor washrooms are for emergency use only; and will be designated
 - Homes are not required to supervise visits but have the discretion to do so in order to manage health and safety during visits
 - Any supervision of visits should respect the resident's right to communicate in confidence, receive visitors of their choice (within ministry vaccination/other directives) and consult in private with any person without interference
 - Whereas visitors are permitted, Homes have the discretion to require visits to be:
 - Scheduled in advance (e.g. unvaccinated visitor)
 - Limited in time, provided the visit is at least 30 minutes, starting from the time the visitor and resident have arrived in the visiting area (e.g. unvaccinated visitor whereby space is limited)
 - In any appropriate area of the Home (e.g. dedicated outdoor area, resident room, specified indoor area, etc.)
 - Homes have discretion to manage visits as appropriate to balance the safety of residents, staff, and visitors with the needs of the Home and its residents
 - All visitors to the Home (general, support, essential caregivers, etc.) must pass the screening upon entry to the Home; and, as applicable, must pass ministry/public health testing requirements/timelines (i.e. rapid antigen testing, PCR testing, etc.) and vaccination requirements
 - In exceptional circumstances, where outdoor visits and/or outings are not feasible (i.e. inclement weather), management of the Home will utilize the risk assessment/condition checklist criteria to determine ability to support unvaccinated visitor visits within a designated area of the Home
 - The risk assessment/condition checklist will incorporate resident and roommate (if applicable) considerations, additional IPAC measures to be taken by the visitor and resident, ability to schedule visit appointments in designated locations, etc.



HOMES AND SENIORS SERVICES

POLICY & PROCEDURE NUMBER: 1.35

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SUBJECT: *Visitors and Resident Absences During a Pandemic*

APPROVAL DATE: September 2020

REVISION DATE: February 2021; October 2021; January 2022; March 2022; May 2022; Oct. 2022; November 2022

Page 7 of 11

Non-adherence by Visitors:

- The following are procedures for responding to non-adherence by visitors in the Home:
 - Support visitors in understanding and adhering to the Home's visitor policy
 - Recognize visits as critical to supporting a resident's care needs and emotional well-being
 - Consider the impact of discontinuing visits on the resident's clinical and emotional well-being
 - Reflect and be proportionate to the severity of the non-adherence
 - Where the Home ends a visit or temporarily prohibits a visitor, specifies any education/training the visitor may need to complete before visiting the Home again
 - Protect residents, staff and visitors in the Home from the risk of COVID-19

Ending a Visit

- Homes may end a visit after repeated non-adherence, provided:
 - Home has explained the applicable requirement to the visitor
 - The visitor has been given sufficient time and resources to adhere to the requirement (e.g. there is sufficient space to physically distance)

Temporarily Prohibiting a Visitor

- Homes have the discretion to temporarily prohibit a visitor in response to repeated and flagrant non-adherence with the Home's visitor policy. In exercising this discretion, Homes should consider whether the non-adherence:
 - Can be resolved successfully by explaining and demonstrating how the visitor can adhere to the requirements
 - Is within requirements that align with instruction in ministry/public health direction and guidance in this policy
 - Negatively impacts the health and safety of residents, staff and other visitors in the home
 - Is demonstrated continuously by the visitor over multiple visits
 - Is by a visitor whose previous visits have been ended by the home

Any decision to temporarily prohibit a visitor should:

- Be made only after all other reasonable efforts to maintain safety during visits have been exhausted
- Stipulate a reasonable length of the prohibition
- Clearly identify what requirements the visitor should meet before resuming visits (e.g. reviewing the Home's visitor policy, reviewing Public Health Ontario resources, etc.)



HOMES AND SENIORS SERVICES

POLICY & PROCEDURE NUMBER: 1.35

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SUBJECT: *Visitors and Resident Absences During a Pandemic*

APPROVAL DATE: September 2020

REVISION DATE: February 2021; October 2021; January 2022; March 2022; May 2022; Oct. 2022; November 2022

Page 8 of 11

-
- Be documented by the Home
 - Where the Home has temporarily prohibited a caregiver, the resident and/or their SDM may need to designate an alternate individual as caregiver to help meet the resident's care needs.
 - **Essential visitors**
 - Essential visitors defined as including a person performing essential support services (e.g. food delivery, inspector, maintenance, or health care services (e.g. phlebotomy) or a person visiting a very ill or palliative resident
 - Essential visitors include support workers and caregivers. However, an essential visitor does not need to be a support worker or caregiver, as long as they meet the definition
 - Support worker is a type of essential visitor who is visiting to perform essential support services for the Home or for a resident at the Home (physicians, nurse practitioners, maintenance workers or a person delivering food, provided they are not staff of the Home as defined within the Long-Term Care Home Act)
 - Caregiver is a type of essential visitor who is
 - Designated by the resident and/or their substitute decision maker; and
 - Visiting to provide direct care to the resident (e.g. supporting feeding, mobility, personal hygiene, cognitive stimulation, communication, meaningful connection and assistance in decision making)
 - Examples of caregivers include family members who provide meaningful connection, a privately hired caregiver, paid companions and translators
 - Caregivers must be at least 18 years of age
 - The decision to designate an individual as a caregiver is entirely the decision of the resident and/or their substitute decision-maker (SDM)
 - Caregiver designations must be requested in writing and will be documented
 - A resident and/or their SDM may change a designation in response to a change in the resident's care needs that is reflected in the plan of care; availability of a designated caregiver, either temporary (e.g. illness) or permanent. Such changes in designation shall be for urgent needs/reasons and shall be approved by a manager of the Home
 - The Home should ensure there is the ability for adequate physical distancing between groups and persons (as required) and that public health measures are being followed



HOMES AND SENIORS SERVICES

POLICY & PROCEDURE NUMBER: 1.35

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SUBJECT: *Visitors and Resident Absences During a Pandemic*

APPROVAL DATE: September 2020

REVISION DATE: February 2021; October 2021; January 2022; March 2022; May 2022; Oct. 2022; November 2022

Page 9 of 11

-
- One essential visitor may be permitted if the Home is in outbreak, or, the resident is self-isolating or symptomatic pending the direction of local public health
 - Where a support person requires immediate access to the Home in an emergency situation, the Home does not need to ask for proof of vaccination status
 - Homes are responsible for providing surgical/procedure masks, gloves, gowns, and eye protection (i.e. Face shield or goggles) for essential visitors as required

 - **General Visitors**
 - A general visitor is a person who is not an essential visitor and is visiting:
 - To provide non-essential services, who may or may not be hired by the Home or the resident and/or their substitute decision-maker; and/or
 - For social reasons (e.g. family member or friends) that the resident or their substitute decision-maker assess as different from direct care, including care related to cognitive stimulation, meaningful connection, and relational continuity
 - The Home should ensure there is the ability for adequate physical distancing between groups and persons (as required) and that public health measures are being followed.
 - General visitors younger than 14 years of age should be accompanied by an adult
 - General visitors may not be permitted if the Home is in outbreak or the resident is self-isolating or symptomatic or when ministry directives limit access of general visitors to the Home

 - Prior to visiting any resident for the first time, monthly, and as required/identified, the Home will provide training to caregivers that addresses how to safely provide direct care, including putting on and taking off required personal protective equipment (PPE) and hand hygiene
 - Homes may not require a person visiting an ill or palliative resident to provide proof of vaccination status given the urgency of the situation
 - Homes are responsible for providing surgical/procedure masks for visitors for indoor visits
 - Visitors are responsible for bringing their own cloth mask or face covering for outdoor visits. As of April 27, 2022, masks are not required outdoors for residents and visitors (general and essential). However, outdoor masking is still strongly recommended and encouraged where tolerated as an added layer of protection when in close proximity to others (i.e. closer than 6 feet). As such, a mask will be required for all outdoor visits not conducted at the designated outdoor visit table which provides for 6 feet of physical distancing.



HOMES AND SENIORS SERVICES

POLICY & PROCEDURE NUMBER: 1.35

DEPARTMENT: Administration

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REVISION DATE: February 2021; October 2021; January 2022; March 2022; May 2022; Oct. 2022; November 2022

Screening Measures for Visitors

Measures	Applicable To
Active screening on entry for symptoms and exposures for COVID-19, including temperature checks	All types of visitors, including short stay and temporary absences when permitted
Attest to not be experiencing any of the typical and atypical symptoms	All types of visitors, including short stay and temporary absences when permitted
Provide evidence and/or consent to required pandemic related testing (e.g. rapid antigen, etc.) to the Home that they have tested negative for COVID-19 within the required ministry directives/public health guidelines and, not subsequently tested positive	Support workers Caregivers General visitors visiting indoors when permitted Individual picking resident up for short stay and temporary absences when permitted
Verbally attest that, in the last 14 days, they have not visited another home in an outbreak or a resident who is self-isolating or symptomatic	Caregivers General visitors – indoor and outdoor Individual picking resident up for short stay and temporary absences
Prior to visiting any resident for the first time, and at least once every month thereafter, verbally attest to the Home that they have read/re-read the Home’s visitor policy	All types of visitors; including individuals taking resident out for short stay and temporary absences

- **Education**
- Public Health Ontario resources should be made available as education on Infection Prevention and Control (IPAC) and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) as follows:

Caregivers	General Visitors
Document: Recommended steps: Putting on PPE	Document: Recommended steps: Putting on PPE
Video: Putting on Full PPE	Video: Putting on One-Piece Facial Protection



HOMES AND SENIORS SERVICES

POLICY & PROCEDURE NUMBER: 1.35

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SUBJECT: *Visitors and Resident Absences During a Pandemic*

APPROVAL DATE: September 2020

REVISION DATE: February 2021; October 2021; January 2022; March 2022; May 2022; Oct. 2022; November 2022

Page 11 of 11

Video: Taking off Full PPE	Video: Taking off One-Piece Facial Protection
Video: How to Hand Wash	Video: How to Hand Wash

References:

1. Key Messages to Support Residents and Families (EN) – March 9, 2022
2. Key Messages to Support Residents and Families (FR) – March 9, 2022
3. Visitor Absences and Social Gatherings Snapshot (EN) – March 14, 2022
4. Visitor Absences and Social Gatherings Snapshot (FR) – March 14, 2022
5. COVID-19 Guidance Document for Long-Term Care Homes in Ontario, October 14, 2022
6. Memo from the Associate Deputy Minister of Health: Long-Term Care Pandemic Response Update – April 25, 2022
7. Directive #3, COVID-19 Guidance Document for LTCHs, and Rapid Testing Merged FAQs – April 25, 2022 and May 13, 2022
8. Ministry of Long-Term Care: “Resuming Visits in Long-Term Care Homes” Released September 2, 2020
9. Ministry of Health – Staying Up to Date with COVID-19 Vaccines: Recommended Doses, May 2, 2022
10. Southwestern Public Health: Public Health Principles for Living with COVID-19 and Protecting the Most Vulnerable Citizens, April 11, 2022
11. COVID-19 Guidance: Long-Term Care Homes, Retirement Homes, and Other Congregate Living Settings for Public Health Units; MOH; October 2022