



HOMES AND SENIORS SERVICES

POLICY & PROCEDURE NUMBER: 1.35

DEPARTMENT: Administration

SUBJECT: *Visitors and Resident Absences During a Disease Outbreak, Epidemic or Pandemic*

APPROVAL DATE: September 2020

REVISION DATE: February 2021; October 2021; January 2022; March 2022; May 2022; Oct. 2022; November 2022; March 2023; Dec. 2023; August 2024

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POLICY:

During an outbreak, epidemic or 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 an outbreak, epidemic or 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 provide education and communication to support self-screening of visitors as per ministry and/or public health directives. A visitor log will be utilized and 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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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. A risk assessment may be required to be completed per legislation and/or public health direction, 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 and other respiratory symptoms or infections 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
- Residents that leave the home for any type of absence do not have to be actively screened, tested or quarantined upon return to the Home unless otherwise directed by public health, during outbreak in the home, and/or if symptomatic on return.



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- Resident will be provided with a medical mask for occasions where a mask may be warranted.
- Medications provided as per pharmacy leave of absence policy
- Residents, family and friends are to be reminded about the importance of any applicable public health measures including physical distancing, hand hygiene, mask etiquette, respiratory etiquette, social circles, indoor capacity limits, etc.
- The Home will follow Public Health guidance for any absence requests during an outbreak, epidemic and/or pandemic.
- Short stay absences may be recommended to be cancelled in the event of an outbreak 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 that leave the home for any type of absence do not have to be actively screened, tested or quarantined upon return to the Home unless otherwise directed by public health, during outbreak in the home, and/or if symptomatic on return.
- 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
- The Home will follow Public Health guidance for any absence requests during an outbreak, epidemic and/or pandemic. 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



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- If the Home recommends to deny 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, if applicable, self-isolation upon return to the Home
- All family members or friends must self-screen for gastroenteric and respiratory symptoms prior to picking up the resident. If family members/friends fail the self-screen, the outing must be rescheduled
- Residents that leave the home for any type of absence do not have to be actively screened, tested or quarantined upon return to the Home unless otherwise directed by public health, during outbreak in the home, and/or if symptomatic on return.
- Resident will be provided with a medical mask-for occasions where a mask may be warranted 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 any applicable public health measures including physical distancing, hand hygiene, mask etiquette, respiratory etiquette, social circles, etc.
- The Home will follow Public Health guidance for any absence requests during an outbreak, epidemic and/or pandemic.
- Temporary absences may be recommended to be cancelled in the event of an outbreak at the Home and/or as per ministry/public health direction

3. Visiting Guidelines:

- Effective March 31, 2023, the Ministry of Long-Term Care provided guidance that strongly recommends long-term care homes revisit mandatory vaccination visitor policies providing reference to resident vaccination uptake, the availability of booster doses, and, with consideration to the Residents' Bill of Rights, including the residents' right to receive visitors of their choice.
- This shift does not change the critical importance of vaccination as a key defense against COVID-19, influenza and RSV. 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.



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- Effective April 17, 2023, all indoor and outdoor visitors to the Home will not be required to provide proof of COVID-19 vaccination; but, will be strongly encouraged to get vaccinated and receive medically recommended boosters.
 - Unvaccinated visitors are encouraged to consider visiting only with their loved one.
 - All visitors are encouraged to wear a mask at all times.
 - All visitors are required to wear a mask while visiting a resident in isolation for respiratory symptoms, as directed by public health.
 - All staff are required to wear a mask as determined by a point-of-care risk assessment; and/or as per public health or ministry directives.
 - 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.
 - Essential caregivers shall have access to the long-term care home during an outbreak of a communicable disease, an outbreak of public health significance, an epidemic or a pandemic or another emergency, subject to any applicable laws.
 - Effective, June 26, 2023, masks are recommended but not required. If a visitor has tested positive for COVID or having COVID like symptoms they must refrain from non-essential visits to the home and not visit anyone at high risk for illness for 10 days. 10 days would start from the symptom onset or swab collection (whichever is sooner). If an essential caregiver is asymptomatic or symptoms have resolved within the 10-day time frame they may enter the home if it is deemed essential to the residents overall health and well-being. The essential visitor must follow measures to reduce the risk of transmission for the full 10 days, including wearing a mask.
 - Eating and drinking by visitors can now be enjoyed for dining and sharing a meal or beverage within the home.
 - Visitors are provided with Infection Prevention and Control (IPAC) education/information on applicable IPAC requirements including hand hygiene, physical distancing, number of visitors permitted, mask etiquette, personal protective equipment as required by public health/ministry guidance
 - All visitors to the Home (general, support, essential caregivers, etc.) must pass the self-screening requirement prior to entry to the Home.



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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, outbreak, epidemic or pandemic

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

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.)



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- 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. Approval from a parent or legal guardian is required to permit persons under 16 years of age to be designated as a caregiver, if applicable.
 - 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



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- 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
- 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
- The Home will provide applicable education/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 are responsible for providing surgical/procedure masks for visitors for indoor visits



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Screening Measures for Visitors

Measures	Applicable To
Passive: self-screening on entry for symptoms and exposures for COVID-19 or other respiratory/enteric symptoms	All types of visitors, including short stay and temporary absences when permitted
Read the Homes Visitor Policy prior to visiting any resident for the first time, and reviewed at regular intervals as per ministry guidance and the needs of the home.	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



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

References:

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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
12. Ministry of Long-term Care: COVID-19 Guidance Document for Long-Term Care Homes in Ontario; March 22, 2023.
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14. MLTC, Covid-19 Guidance document for Long Term Care Home in Ontario, June 26, 2023
15. Ministry of Long-Term Care Pandemic Recovery and Stabilization Guidance Document, effective July 1, 2024.