

December 31, 2021

## Ontario Updating Public Health Measures and Guidance in Response to Omicron

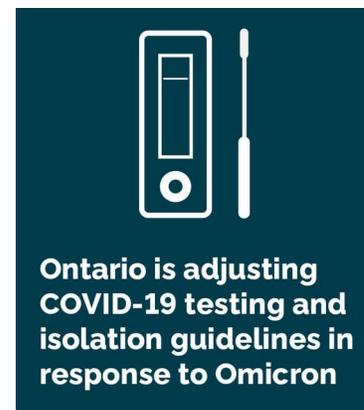
Dear Family and Friends,

In response to the highly transmissible Omicron variant, on December 30<sup>th</sup>, the Ontario government directed the following additional protection to high-risk settings including long-term care. Updated testing and isolation requirements are being implemented, and, in an effort to continue to safeguard hospitals/ICU capacity, enhanced vaccination requirements for long-term care and an accelerated fourth dose rollout for our vulnerable residents is underway.

### Updated Testing Guidelines

Effective December 31, publicly funded PCR testing will be available **only** for high-risk individuals who are symptomatic and/or are at risk of severe illness from COVID-19, including for the purposes of confirming a COVID-19 diagnosis to begin treatment, and workers and residents in the highest risk settings, as well as vulnerable populations. Members of the general public with mild symptoms are asked **not** to seek testing. This includes, but is not limited to, the following relevant to long-term care and seniors services:

- Staff, residents, essential care providers, and visitors in hospitals and congregate living settings, including long-term care, retirement homes, First Nation elder care lodges, group homes, shelters, hospices, temporary foreign worker settings, and correctional institutions
- People on admission/transfer to or from hospital or congregate living setting
- High-risk contacts and asymptomatic/symptomatic people in the context of confirmed or suspected outbreaks in high-risk settings, including hospitals, long-term care, retirement homes, other congregate living settings and institutions, and other settings as directed by the local public health unit
- Asymptomatic testing in hospital, long-term care, retirement homes and other congregate living settings and Institutions as per provincial guidance and/or Directives



### **Reminder** General Visitors

- General visitors not permitted at this time
- External Personal Care Services are on hold (i.e: hairdresser, massage therapist etc.)

### **Reminder** Essential Caregivers (ECG)

- Max of 2 ECGs at a time per resident, 1 hour visits
- Max of 2 designated EGC per resident (unless already in place)
- No limit on number of visitors for "End of Life" residents

## **Reminder Resident Absences**

- Overnight absences are currently suspended
- Day absences for social purposes are **not** permitted regardless of vaccination status
- Day absences for essential purposes only (i.e. medical) RAT x 7 days upon return
- Daily/frequent absences permitted for medical reasons (i.e. dialysis) – Resident requires PCR and RAT on same day, twice weekly

## **UPDATE Isolation Requirements**

Ontario is also changing the required isolation period based on growing evidence that generally healthy people with COVID-19 are most infectious in the two (2) days before and three (3) days after symptoms develop. Individuals with COVID-19 who are fully vaccinated, as well as children under 12, will be required to isolate for **five (5) days following the onset of symptoms**. Their household contacts are also required to isolate with them. These individuals can end isolation after five (5) days if their symptoms are improved for at least 24 hours and all public health and safety measures, such as masking and physical distancing, are followed. Non-household contacts are required to self-monitor for 10 days.

Individuals who are unvaccinated, partially vaccinated or immunocompromised will be required to isolate for **10 days**. While individuals who work or live-in high-risk health care settings are recommended to return to work after 10 days from their last exposure or symptom onset or from their date of diagnosis, to ensure sufficient staffing levels workers will have the opportunity to return to work after isolating for seven (7) days with negative PCR or rapid antigen test results, which will be provided by the province through the health care setting.



## **NEW Mandatory Third Dose Requirement for Long-Term Care and Seniors Services**

Several staff have inquired as to whether the third vaccination dose would become a mandatory requirement. As part of yesterday's announcement, because of the uniquely high-risk nature of long-term care and seniors services settings for Ontario's most vulnerable individuals, the province has now **mandated third doses for all staff, students, volunteers, caregivers and support workers by January 28, 2022** for those

currently eligible for a booster and will be requiring visitors to provide proof of three (3) doses of a Health Canada approved vaccine once the temporary pause on general visitors is lifted.

If not yet eligible, staff, volunteers and support workers will have until March 4, 2022 to show proof; essential caregivers have until May 23, 2022.

As of December 13, 2021, all staff had to have received two (2) doses of a Health Canada approved vaccine to work in long-term care homes and seniors services, unless they have a valid medical exemption. We are pleased to advise that as of December 30<sup>th</sup>, 39.5% of staff and 97% of residents in long-term care and seniors services have received their third dose booster. We continue to work with the health unit to increase access to clinics and third doses for our staff, residents and essential caregivers and will be asking for support from Public Health in the coming days.

In the interim, please consider booking your booster through the [Provincial Booking System](#) at your earliest opportunity.

### **NEW Offering Fourth Doses to Long-Term Care Residents**

Based on the recommendations from the Ontario Immunization Advisory Committee, effective immediately the province will be making fourth doses of mRNA vaccines available to residents of long-term care homes, retirement homes, Elder Care Lodges and other congregate care settings if at least three (3) months, or 84 days, have passed since their third dose.



Given the continued high rates of infection in our province, the County is implementing the following additional safety measures, effective immediately:

### **NEW Essential Caregiver Visits**

Please note, in order to provide the highest level of protection possible and minimize traffic throughout the home, the County is strongly recommending that essential caregivers temporarily postpone their visit unless for essential reasons.

In addition, should an essential caregiver test positive for COVID-19 via rapid antigen test or PCR, they will **not** be permitted to enter the home until cleared by public health. This includes when visiting palliative/end of life residents.

For resident safety to reduce further risk of community exposure, should you still plan to visit, we are **temporarily** requiring that all essential caregivers pre-book their visits to the home. We also ask that essential caregivers consider limiting their visits to one hour at a time, helping to maximize the number of residents able to visit with their loved ones and to ensure they go directly to their loved one's unit and not socialize with any other residents at any time.

Visit <https://www.simcoe.ca/LongTermCare/Pages/BookAVisit.aspx> to book your appointment today.



On behalf of all of us at the County of Simcoe, Happy New Year to you and your loved ones. I know 2021 was another tough year due to the ongoing pandemic, but we made it and we remain stronger together. 2022 brings with it an opportunity to start a new chapter and I hope next year will be an incredible part of your story.

Sincerely,

*Jane*

Jane Sinclair  
General Manager, Health and Emergency Services  
County of Simcoe