

December 31, 2021

Dear:

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in British Columbia (BC) the Ministry of Health, in consultation with BC's Provincial Health Officer, mobilized to rapidly respond to the risk of COVID-19 transmission in congregate care settings. Several enhanced protective measures have been put in place to minimize the risk for introduction and transmission of COVID-19 in long-term care homes and seniors' assisted living residences and protect those most vulnerable to serious illness.

On December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2021 the Provincial Health Officer and the Ministry of Health announced that effective January 1, 2022 visits to long-term care (LTC) will be limited to essential visits only. The Provincial Health Officer (PHO) recognizes the impact of limiting visitors has on residents and families and commits to reviewing the order in mid-January. The visitor restriction to essential visitors will remain in place until it is rescinded by the PHO.

Furthermore, in recognition of the increased transmissibility of the Omicron variant of concern and given the vulnerability of residents in long-term care even when fully vaccinated themselves, the PHO announced on December 21, 2021 that all visitors to long-term care homes must be screened for COVID-19 by receiving a rapid point-of-care test prior to their visit, whether visiting indoors or outdoors.

Rapid POC tests provide the opportunity to rapidly screen people for COVID-19, with results ready in approximately 20 minutes. These tests can help reduce the potential for introduction and spread of COVID-19 in long-term care homes. The rapid POC screening requirement for visitors 12 or older is **in addition to** the current requirements for visitors to be screened for symptoms of illness, including COVID-19, to be fully vaccinated, and to adhere to infection prevention and control measures while visiting. Visitors who have symptoms of COVID-19, who do not demonstrate that they are fully vaccinated (or provide an approved medical exemption), who receive a positive rapid POC test result, or who choose not to undergo a rapid POC test will not be able to visit. There are no exceptions to the rapid POC screening requirement based on medical exemption from vaccination, or essential visitor status, including compassionate visits related to end-of-life.

In addition to the rapid POC screening requirement and to further mitigate the potential for introduction and spread of COVID-19 in long-term care homes, visitors will also be required to wear a medical mask for the duration of their visit. This will be for all visits whether it is taking place in a single-bed room, in a designated visiting area, or in an outdoor setting.

To support these changes, the Ministry of Health [Overview of Visitors in Long-Term Care and Seniors 'Assisted Living](#) is being updated and will be made available in early January.

For your information, each site will begin the mandatory rapid POC screening for visitors as soon as a supply of rapid POC test kits have been received. This is an additional measure to the current visitor screening process and will be implemented in alignment with provincial guidance which, effective January 1, restricts visits in long term care to essential visits only. Visitors undergoing a rapid POC screening process can expect the following:

- Children under 12 years of age are not required to undergo rapid POC screening.
- Individuals who receive a positive test result will be directed to self-isolate and are referred to the guidance on-line at <http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/testing/rapid-antigen-testing#I--tested--positive>. Operators are required to report all positive test results to public health.
- Individuals who receive an inconclusive test result will be required to undergo another rapid POC test.
- There are no exceptions to the rapid POC screening requirement based on medical exemption from vaccination, essential visitor status, including compassionate visits related to end-of-life.

Additional information regarding visitation, including rapid POC screening and proof of vaccination requirements, in long-term care can be found through the [BC Centre for Disease Control – Long-Term Care and Assisted Living](#) and the [Rapid COVID-19 Point-of-Care Testing in BC](#) information sheet.

Thank you for continuing to take the necessary steps to support residents and staff to stay safe during these challenging times. Your support is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,