

## QUESTIONS & ANSWERS:

# COVID-19 Requirements for Licensed Supportive Living, Long-Term Care and Hospice Settings (CMOH Orders 36 and 37-2021)

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### General

#### What is the approach to easing COVID-19 restrictions in these settings?

- Alberta is taking a two phase approach to easing restrictions in licensed supportive living, long-term care and hospice settings. This approach recognizes the readiness of operators, staff, residents and family/support persons for incremental easing while balancing the transitory need to ensure preventative measures are in place before resuming pre-pandemic processes to communicable disease control.
- Phase 1:
  - Remove requirements that are no longer needed to prevent or limit the spread of COVID-19 (including restrictions on numbers and types of visiting persons)  
*\*Where requirements have been removed from the order, this indicates there is no longer a need for public health restrictions specific to that topic and pre-pandemic process should be resumed.*
  - Maintains:
    - Continuous masking for staff, students, volunteers and service providers
    - Continuous masking for visiting persons while in common areas
    - Enhanced cleaning and disinfection (twice daily in common areas only)
    - Health assessment screening upon entry for staff, students, services providers, volunteers and visiting persons
    - Testing guidelines for residents and staff with symptoms or COVID exposure
    - Situation specific isolation/quarantine requirements
    - Outbreak procedures
- Phase 2: (Timing of Phase 2 will be reassessed in the fall)
  - Will at that time rescind all remaining CMOH Orders specific to licensed supportive living, long-term care and hospice
  - Back to pre-pandemic processes and expectations

#### What are the changes in CMOH Order 36-2021?

- This order rescinds Order 16-2021 (visiting restrictions) which then returns responsibility back to site operators to develop their own processes (in collaboration from residents and their families), if deemed necessary.
- As the risk to public health has substantively reduced with the increase in vaccine uptake, visiting restrictions are no longer needed.
  - Visiting persons are required to mask in common areas (as per Order 37-2021).

#### What are the changes in CMOH Order 37-2021?

- Changes to operational and outbreak standards include removing, easing and amending sections of the order. For further details, please review Revision History.

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### Why are the operational and outbreak standards being updated now? Are these settings safe to live in, work at, and visit?

- Yes, these settings continue to be safe to live in, work at, and visit.
- As more Albertans, including staff and residents at these sites, become vaccinated, there is no longer the public health threat and inherent need to require strict expectations to protect against COVID-19 in these settings. Many restrictions will be eased to support quality of life and health and wellbeing of residents.
- Vaccinations in these settings have greatly reduced the negative outcomes related to COVID-19 infections.
- While there continues to be a risk of exposure to and transmission of COVID-19, a number of safety precautions continue to be in place to ensure continued protection for vulnerable populations.
  - These safety measures include continuous masking, enhanced cleaning and disinfection, health screening upon entry, testing guidelines, isolation/quarantine when required, and outbreak procedures.

### Is it safe for children to visit?

- Any individual who passes health assessment screening is allowed to visit, regardless of age.
- It is recognized that there is benefit as well as some risk in allowing children under 12 to visit, and this benefit is the reason that children are not universally restricted from visiting.
- Recognizing that children under 12 have not yet been able to receive COVID-19 vaccine, accompanying adults and those residents receiving these visitors are encouraged to remain vigilant in their own assessment of risk and conduct themselves appropriately.
  - Children who are infected with COVID-19 can have very mild symptoms or have no symptoms at all.
  - It is imperative that as part of the symptom screening, children and parents are extremely diligent in identifying any possible symptoms the child may have and not bring the child into the facility if they are symptomatic.
- It is recommended that visiting persons who have not yet had the opportunity to be fully vaccinated (including children between 2 and 12) wear a mask in all areas of the building at all times, including resident rooms.

### When will the remaining restrictions be lifted in these settings?

- While the date is not landed, we heard from residents, families, staff and operators that there is a desire for some measures to stay in place until at least the fall.

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### What facilities are impacted by these changes?

- All licensed supportive living (including group homes, lodges and designated supportive living), long-term care (nursing homes and auxiliary hospitals), and hospice settings.
- If a facility contains both licensed supportive living spaces and unlicensed spaces, this Order does not apply to the unlicensed spaces/areas of the building/campus. This new order outlines the operational and outbreak standards that apply to support early recognition and swift action for effective management of COVID-19 amongst vulnerable populations.
  - Operators, and others, can determine whether a site is a licensed supportive living accommodation (according to the [Supportive Living Accommodation Licensing Act](#)), or is a long-term care site, by visiting Alberta Health's [public reporting site](#).

### Does removal of CMOH restrictions mean operators are not subject to any expectations?

- Not all CMOH orders are being removed, and CMOH orders supplemented already existing expectations for licensed supportive living and long-term care settings in Alberta, including the [Accommodation Standards, Continuing Care Health Service Standards, Resident and Family Councils Act](#), and any contracts with Alberta Health Services. These expectations remain in place and operators are expected to comply.

### When do these amendments take effect?

- Operators are expected to implement the changes as quickly as possible to improve quality of life for residents but have until July 31, 2021 to completely implement all of the amendments.

### What is Alberta Health doing to ensure operators are not keeping restrictions in place for longer than required?

- Restrictions need to be eased as directed by the CMOH to restore and repair the mental health of residents and staff in these settings.
- Alberta Health and Alberta Health Services monitor the continuing care system overall through several mechanisms including CCHSS audits, Accommodation Standards audits, incoming correspondence and complaints and feedback from experts, including researchers.
- Should Alberta Health conclude that operators are persistently and without resolution being overly restrictive, there are mechanisms in place (e.g. ministerial orders) to require operators to comply with the intent of easing restrictions.
- The entire [facility-based continuing care](#) system including associated legislation is currently under review. We have taken what we have learned through this pandemic and will be implementing systemic changes to improve quality of life for residents.

### Why are vaccinations not mandatory/can an operator mandate vaccination for staff?

- COVID-19 vaccination is not mandatory in Alberta.
- Operators may impose specific work instructions for non-vaccinated staff in the event of an outbreak.

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### How will non-vaccinated staff be managed in the event of an outbreak?

- Non-vaccinated staff may be unable to work in the event of an outbreak, depending on the nature of the outbreak and the measures needed for outbreak control.
- Sites can follow up with their local Medical Officer of Health (MOH) or their designate to determine best practice for non-vaccinated staff in the event of an outbreak.

### What should we expect this winter with influenza season?

- Public health experts are closely monitoring projections for the influenza season.
- When available, influenza vaccinations are strongly encouraged.

### Why are some restrictions remaining in place when these settings have much higher rates of vaccination compared to the general population?

- Although these settings have much higher rates of vaccination, the communal/shared nature of living, as well as the frequent close contact between residents and staff warrants the need for some preventative measures to remain in place as we assess the impact of highly transmissible new variants of concern.
- It will be imperative to balance these continued safety measures with the need to return to regular social activities to support quality of life for residents.

## Outbreak Phases

### When will the threshold to declare an outbreak be increased to more than one individual?

- The thresholds are published in the [Alberta Health Disease Management Guidelines](#) in Table C2. Please ensure you are referencing the latest version for the most up to date information.
- As the provincial public health restrictions ease in the future, it is anticipated that there will be changes to the definition of an outbreak in continuing care.

## Symptoms and Health Screening

### Are residents still required to be screened at the door every time they enter the building?

- There are no longer any requirements to screen residents upon entry to their building. Sites will continue to conduct health assessments of residents as needed or as part of the resident's daily care plan.

### What are the screening requirements for working or visiting individuals?

- Staff, Students, Service Providers, and Volunteers are to be actively screened prior to the start of each shift.
- Visiting persons are to be actively screened at entry to the site.

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- Active screening involves a satisfactory COVID-19 screening using [Alberta Health Daily Checklist \(as appropriate for children under 18; or for adults 18 and older\)](#). This screening must be confirmed upon entry by a staff member.

### Can operators add additional screening questions (e.g. have you travelled inter-provincially in the last 14 days)?

- No. Operators are not permitted to add additional questions which could exclude persons from entering the site.

### Do health assessment screening documents need to be stored by the operator?

- Operators should not store the completed COVID-19 health screening documents from any person who enters the site, but rather dispose of it confidentially (NOTE: these documents contain health information).

### What information do operators need to store and for how long?

- For anyone permitted to enter, operators are required to record and store the following information for contact tracing purposes, for a minimum of 4 weeks but not for longer than required for the purposed of contact tracing: name, contact information (phone number, email) and date and time of entry and exit.
- For questions about your obligations under the *Personal Information Protection Act*, please contact the FOIP-PIPA Help Desk by phone 780-427-5848.

## Testing and Isolation

### With the easing of restrictions, are there any changes to how we manage residents who are symptomatic or have been close contacts?

- The management of symptomatic residents or asymptomatic residents who are or may have been a close contact of a COVID-19 positive case has not changed. Continue to follow the direction of the [Alberta Public Health Disease Management Guidelines](#) when determining if isolation or quarantine is necessary for a resident.

### What are the COVID-19 testing guidelines for new and existing residents?

- Indications for testing symptomatic and asymptomatic persons are outlined in the current version of the [Alberta Public Health Disease Management Guidelines](#) and as directed by Public Health. These guidelines are updated from time to time; please ensure you are referencing the most recent version.

### If a resident has previously tested positive for COVID-19, should they be tested again?

- Please refer to the [Alberta Public Health Disease Management Guidelines](#) for the most current direction.

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### How do operators manage test results?

- Indications for isolation and quarantine are outlined in the [Alberta Public Health Disease Management Guidelines](#), as directed by CMOH.
- Please also refer to Order 37-2021:
  - Appendix 1: Management of Fully Vaccinated Resident COVID-19 Test Results
  - Appendix 2: Management of Partially Vaccinated Resident COVID-19 Test Results
  - Appendix 3: Management of Non-Vaccinated Resident COVID-19 Test Results

### Are residents required to disclose vaccination status to the operator?

- Resident vaccination status disclosure is **voluntary**.
- Some operators may know residents' vaccine status as they deliver their healthcare services, however not all operators will know residents' vaccine status.
- If residents choose not to disclose their vaccination status, an operator may consider the resident not vaccinated.

### How can operators confirm vaccination status of a resident?

- Vaccine status is not required to be independently confirmed by the operator. This means that an operator should not follow up with AHS or the pharmacy to confirm.
- Operators can have a conversation with residents to explain the benefits of sharing this information with the operator which may encourage a confidential disclosure.

## Cleaning and Disinfecting

### What are the cleaning and disinfection requirements?

- Common/public areas are required to have high touch surfaces cleaned and disinfected twice per day.
- High touch areas include doorknobs, light switches, call bells, handrails, phones, elevator buttons, TV remotes, care/treatment areas, dining areas, lounges, etc.
- Resident rooms are not common/public areas and do not require enhanced cleaning.

### What are auditors looking for to ensure cleaning is being completed?

- Auditors are looking for evidence such as cleaning schedules, logs or flow sheets including what surface cleaning is being done. Auditors will also be completing visual inspections of different areas of the building.
- Auditors may also have discussions with staff who are responsible for the cleaning to ensure that staff are aware of the required processes.



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### Group Recreation, Activities, Singing and Shared Dining

**Can residents resume all recreation activities (card games, singing, group meal preparation, buffets, etc.)?**

- Yes, all activities that residents enjoyed pre-pandemic may resume.

**Can musical performers play for residents?**

- Yes, all musical and other performances for residents may resume.
- Special consideration should be given for performers who are unvaccinated including children under 12 years old (some examples of possible risk mitigating measures include outdoor performances, extra physical distance from audience, barriers, etc.)

**Are tables in the shared dining room still required to be 6ft apart?**

- No, tables are no longer required to be 6ft apart.

**Can residents now dine with whomever they want during mealtimes rather than the same cohort for all meals?**

- There are no provincial restrictions for mealtimes and dining arrangements. As operators resume pre-pandemic processes, please discuss this further with the site administration.

**Can family members dine with residents?**

- There are no provincial restrictions for dining with family members. As operators resume pre-pandemic processes, please discuss this further with the site administration.

**If the site has an outbreak, will these activities and shared dining be paused?**

- In the event of an outbreak, the MOH or their designate will identify if group activities and shared dining will need to be restricted. These activities can resume as normal, unless indicated by the MOH (or designate).

### Miscellaneous

**I have some questions and concerns about the COVID-19 vaccines, where can I get more information.**

- The Health Canada approved vaccines are safe, effective and help prevent serious illness from COVID-19. High vaccine uptake has been proven to reduce the risk of introduction and transmission of COVID-19 in continuing care settings.
- For more information about COVID-19 Vaccines see [Health Canada](#), [Alberta Health](#) and Healthcare Excellence Canada for resources about [vaccine preparedness for long-term care and retirement homes](#).

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### What recourse is available for residents and families if facilities continue to require restrictions without the provincial requirement to do so?

- Operators are expected to include residents and families in planning for any processes and house rules that impact them directly.
- CMOH public health restrictions supplemented already existing expectations for licensed supportive living and long-term care operators in Alberta.
  - Operators are required to comply with relevant legislation and standards, including the Resident and Family Councils Act, Accommodation Standards and, where applicable, the Continuing Care Health Service Standards.
  - Operators must have a concerns and complaint process to resolve issues at a local level. In addition, they must support the formation and activity of a Resident and Family Council for active inclusion of resident and family voices in operating decisions.
- Results of inspections and audits are reported publicly online at: <https://standardsandlicensing.alberta.ca/>.
- Serious concerns that are not addressed at a local level may be directed to [ASAL@gov.ab.ca](mailto:ASAL@gov.ab.ca).

### Can residents go off site and engage in any activity they desire?

- Yes, like all Albertans, residents are able to engage in any activity off site that they desire.
- Operators do not have the authority to restrict resident activity.
- Residents are also no longer required to be screened upon re-entry to the building or required to quarantine if they have gone off-site.

### Are there suggested special considerations for non-vaccinated staff, residents, visiting persons?

- Despite the relaxation of many restrictions, all persons entering these settings are encouraged to remain vigilant in their own assessment of risk regardless of vaccination status and conduct themselves appropriately.
- It is recommended that Albertans who have not yet had the opportunity to be fully vaccinated continue to wear a mask at all times and in all areas of the building (i.e. it is recommended that visiting persons who are not fully vaccinated wear their mask even in resident rooms/private areas).

### Can visitors bring food in?

- There are no provincial restrictions for food being brought into facilities. As operators resume pre-pandemic processes, please discuss this further with the site administration.

### How is the mental health of residents and staff being addressed?

- The impact of the pandemic on the mental health of residents and staff is well recognized. As restrictions are lifted and pre-pandemic processes and activity resume, clear and honest



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conversations are encouraged at a local level to support the individual needs of persons impacted.

- **It is imperative that residents and families are encouraged and supported to resume the activities they did pre-pandemic, recognizing the significant impact family, socialization and connection have on their mental health and wellbeing.**

### **I used to stay overnight with my parent in their facility. Can I do this now?**

- There are no provincial restrictions for overnight stays. As operators resume pre-pandemic processes, please discuss this further with the site administration.

### **What is the role of risk assessments going forward?**

- Risk assessment process were established in July 2020 as a method of balancing the need to protect persons against COVID-19 with the need to protect quality of life. The risk tolerance assessment tool was intended to encourage involvement of residents and families in site based assessments of risk due to facility design, health of residents, and staff preferences.
- Risk assessment processes are no longer required as sites resume pre-pandemic processes.

### **Can we go back to just having one staff breakroom?**

- There are no provincial restrictions for breakrooms. As operators resume pre-pandemic processes, please discuss this further with the site administration.

### **What is the vaccination plan for the fall, will boosters be required, will it be coordinated with influenza vaccine?**

- Work is underway to determine the need for booster vaccines. There is not enough evidence and data yet to know how long immunity from COVID-19 vaccines lasts.
- Additional information will be made available as more is understood about length of vaccine protection.

### **Do residents have to physical distance between one another?**

- No, residents are not required to physically distance between one another. However, residents who wish to remain distanced should be accommodated, to the extent possible.

### **What is being done to address the issues that COVID-19 highlighted in the continuing care system in Alberta?**

- The Facility Based Continuing Care review is underway in Alberta and seeks to address many of the issues that COVID-19 has brought to the forefront (e.g. impacts on mental health and quality of life for residents). In addition, there is a review of the legislative framework in Alberta which will also seek to enable broad system change for the future of the continuing care system.
- More information is available online at: <https://www.alberta.ca/facility-based-continuing-care-review.aspx>.

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### Can comfort care aides continue to be employed?

- Although the Comfort Care Aide program ended June 30, 2021, operators who are in the position to do so may choose to hire these positions independently.

### Are masks required for in room visiting?

- If the resident prefers that their visiting persons not wear a mask, it can be removed when visiting in resident rooms or other private areas of the building, or while eating/drinking.
  - Masks can be removed in shared rooms as long as 2 metres distance can be maintained from the other resident(s) and any other visiting person(s) in the room.
- It is recommended that those who have not yet had the opportunity to be fully vaccinated wear their mask at all times and in all areas of the building (i.e. it is recommended that visiting persons who are not fully vaccinated wear their mask even in resident rooms/private areas).

### Will easing of all provincial restrictions lead to a 4<sup>th</sup> wave?

- We have learned what measures are most protective and will be prepared to act depending on if there is 4<sup>th</sup> wave and what it looks like.
- Public health experts continue to observe and assess the threat of COVID-19 to the public and any threat to the health system (e.g. demand on hospitals and intensive care units).

### I've tested positive for COVID-19, do I still need to receive the vaccine?

- Yes, you should be vaccinated regardless of whether you already had COVID-19. This is because we do not yet know how long you are protected from getting sick after having had COVID-19. While rare, it is still possible for someone who has recovered from COVID-19 to become re-infected. Studies have shown that vaccination provides a strong boost in protection in people who have recovered from COVID-19 and improves protection against variants of concern.

### We have private businesses within our continuing care setting. Can they be accessed through the shared building entrance again?

- Yes, however all persons entering the site must be screened upon entry for access, including to access private businesses within the continuing care site.

For more information, please visit [alberta.ca/protecting-residents-at-congregate-care-facilities](https://alberta.ca/protecting-residents-at-congregate-care-facilities) or contact [asal@gov.ab.ca](mailto:asal@gov.ab.ca)