

December 16, 2021

AR 196549

All Licensed Supportive Living, Long-term Care and Hospice Operators and Staff

RE: Omicron Variant of Concern

Dear Operators and Staff:

As you are aware, there has been an emergence of a new variant of concern: Omicron, with cases being reported in Alberta. As this is early and we are still learning about Omicron, there is still a lot that we do not know. Early evidence indicates that Omicron is more transmissible. This means that Omicron spreads more easily than Delta. Alberta Health continues to monitor evidence around vaccine effectiveness against Omicron. Vaccines continue to be a very important tool to slow the spread of COVID-19 and prevent severe outcomes like hospitalization and death, and early evidence suggests that two doses of vaccine are still very helpful in reducing the risk of severe outcomes. Alberta Health continues to closely monitor the situation and is committed to making adjustments to public health measures, if required. This means there could be further updates to measures in the coming weeks.

The federal government announced additional border measures to reduce the importation of the Omicron variant. Please review their [announcement](#), as it impacts the screening of international travellers who may try to work or visit a congregate care facility.

Out of an abundance of caution, we are updating the screening process for visitors to continuing care settings until more evidence regarding Omicron is available. On a temporary basis, even if fully vaccinated, visitors and volunteers will not be permitted to enter the site for 14 days following known close contact with any case of COVID-19. Please find an updated version of the screening tool for visitors and volunteers for use as soon as possible. This is a precautionary interim measure intended to prevent the introduction of Omicron into continuing care settings while we learn more about this variant.

Alberta Health is also reviewing policies for residents, health-care staff close contacts and infection prevention and control processes in congregate settings. We expect to share more on these topics next week. In the meantime, please continue to follow the existing Operational and Outbreak Standards ([CMOH Order 37-2021](#)) and use the current screening form for staff, students and service providers.

As [announced](#) on December 15, all health care staff, including congregate care settings, are eligible for booster doses if they received their second dose at least six months ago. If you have not yet been fully immunized, including a booster dose, I strongly recommend you book your vaccine appointment as soon as possible. Thank you for your ongoing support and dedication to the safety of your residents and staff. As always, if you have questions, please reach out to asal@gov.ab.ca. We remain in this together.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Deena Hinshaw", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Deena Hinshaw, BSc, MD, MPH, CCFP, FRCP
Chief Medical Officer of Health

Attachment

cc: Evan Romanow, Assistant Deputy Minister, Health Service Delivery, Alberta Health

Trish Merrithew-Mercredi, Assistant Deputy Minister, Public Health and Compliance, Alberta Health

David O'Brien, Senior Program Officer, Provincial Seniors Health and Continuing Care, Alberta Health Services