

June 29, 2022

All Licensed Supportive Living, Long-Term Care and Hospice Residents and Families

**RE: Continuing Care and Step 3**

Dear Residents and Families:

As of June 30, the CMOH Orders for continuing care are being ended as we move to using different tools for any COVID precautions that are still needed. I am writing today to give you information on what this change means for continuing care residents and their loved ones.

Over the last two months, we have seen a steady reduction in COVID-19 cases, outbreaks, and severe outcomes (hospitalizations and deaths) in continuing care. Alberta Health and Alberta Health Services officials are watching these trends closely.

As we have seen this drop in risk and with the positive impact of vaccines, now is the time to shift away from an emergency response to COVID-19 into a more standard and routine approach. Part of this shift includes moving from CMOH orders to using other standards and policies to protect residents, drawing from what we have learned over the last two years.

Continuing care residents remain among the most vulnerable to severe outcomes related to COVID-19. This is why some protections will stay in place after the CMOH orders are lifted, including the following:

- Continuous masking for staff and visitors in long-term care, designated supportive living, and hospices will be continued through [Alberta Health Services' policy](#) to protect residents and staff at these settings.
  - Wearing a mask in these settings is essential to protect residents who are vulnerable and at higher risks of experiencing severe outcomes from COVID-19.

- In the future, when risk of exposure is very low, continuous masking may be paused. We anticipate however, that every year in the winter, when COVID-19 and other respiratory viruses are most common, masking will be needed again.
- Sick residents will continue to be offered testing and need to be isolated according to their type of illness so infection doesn't spread to other residents and staff.
- Staff will continue to use appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) when providing care to sick residents.
- Outbreak protocols will be maintained through [AHS Outbreak Prevention and Control Guides](#).
  - Outbreak management will continue to be directed by Operators and the Zone Medical Officer of Health (MOH). In the case of an outbreak, the MOH in the particular Zone has the responsibility to assess an outbreak, and the authority to implement measures at the affected site based on the circumstances of the outbreak.

Please be aware that policies and standards set out minimum requirements and they may be further strengthened by operators. We have let operators know that we expect that any policies created are resident-centred. The principles include:

- The purpose and intended outcome of a policy must be clearly outlined and be the lightest touch to meet the desired outcome.
- Policies must be time-limited with a clear review date.
- Policies cannot prevent a resident from receiving their chosen visitors/supports.
- Residents' preferences and risk tolerance in their personal space (e.g., resident room) must consider each individual's desires and needs.
- Policies cannot prevent a resident from receiving care.
- Policies should be driven by the wishes of residents, not by providers.

If you feel that your site has policies that are not resident-centred, I encourage you to reach out to the management team at your site to talk about your concerns. If your concerns are not addressed to your satisfaction, you may wish to contact AHS' Patient Relations Department at 1-855-550-2555 or [online](#).

Vaccines continue to be critical in protecting our health, our loved ones, and the health-care system. Everyone in Alberta age 12 and older is eligible for a third dose to boost protection. Residents in continuing care settings and anyone age 70 and over are also eligible for a fourth dose of COVID-19 vaccine, if it's been 5 months or more since their third dose. If you have not yet received all your vaccine doses, I strongly encourage you to consider doing so.

Thank you for your shared commitment to the safety and wellbeing of your fellow residents and loved ones. There is no single perfect solution or risk-free option in living with COVID, and we continue to work toward seeking a balance with protecting residents from hospitalization and death, while also promoting high quality of life.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Deena Hinshaw". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "D" and "H".

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

cc: Corinne Schalm, Assistant Deputy Minister, Continuing Care Division, Alberta Health

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

Niall MacDonald, Acting Senior Program Officer, Provincial Seniors Health and Continuing Care, Alberta Health Services

Dr. James Silvius, Senior Medical Director, Provincial Seniors Health and Continuing Care, Alberta Health Services