

**Key Messages and QA:
Pandemic Response: New Vaccination, Testing, and Isolation Requirements
December 31, 2021**

- The government is committed to using every resource available to support long-term care homes and staff as we work to stop the spread of COVID-19.
- Based on advice of Dr. Moore, Chief Medical Officer of Health, the Ministry of Long-Term Care is implementing additional requirements to respond to the rapid increase of COVID-19 cases in both the community and long-term care homes. These include changes to the long-term care immunization policy and the launch of fourth doses for residents.
- The Ontario government, in consultation with the Chief Medical Officer of Health, is taking action to manage the surge in new cases and protect Ontarians from severe impacts from the Omicron variant by adjusting its guidance for testing and case and contact management.
- The updated guidance focuses on protecting the most vulnerable by protecting testing and case and contact management capacity for high-risk settings including long-term care homes and will ensure those at highest risk of severe outcomes, and those caring for them, have timely access to test results for immediate clinical and public health management.
- The ministry will continue working closely with Dr. Moore to continually review policies and monitor available evidence to inform the ongoing pandemic response.

Questions & Answers

1. What measures are being implemented that will impact residents and families?

The province is making fourth doses available to long-term care residents; mandating third doses for all staff, students, volunteers, caregivers and support workers.

The province has also updated its guidance for testing and case and contact management to prioritize capacity for high-risk settings including long-term care homes and will ensure those at highest risk of severe outcomes, and those caring for them, have timely access to test results for immediate clinical and public health management

2. Why should residents receive a fourth dose?

Older adults living in shared living settings, such as long-term care residents, are at increased risk for COVID-19 infection and severe COVID-19 disease, including hospitalization and death, because of their age and underlying medical conditions. In the context of the rapidly escalating risk posed by the highly transmissible SARS-CoV-2 variant of concern Omicron, the Ontario Immunization Advisory Committee (OIAC) reviewed unpublished Ontario data on immunogenicity after third booster doses in residents of long-term care, retirement home residents and other shared living settings. Based on their expert opinion they recommended that Ontario begin to offer a fourth

dose of an mRNA vaccine to eligible residents of long-term care homes, retirement homes, Elder Care Lodges and older adults in other shared living settings providing assisted living and health services. This will provide them with an extra layer of protection against COVID-19 and its variants.

3. What scientific evidence is the decision to administer fourth doses to residents of LTC homes based on?

Evidence shows that 10 to 12 weeks after receiving the third dose of COVID-19 vaccine the immune response in older residents who live in long-term care homes wanes significantly compared to the general population. Administering a fourth dose to residents of long-term care homes, licensed retirement homes and elder care lodges, can help boost their immune response for improved protection against COVID-19.

4. When will older residents of shared living settings receive their fourth dose?

Residents of long-term care homes, licensed retirement homes and Elder Care Lodges will generally receive their fourth dose in their residence. Their fourth dose can be administered at a minimum of three months (or 84 days) following their third dose. Long-term care homes will be planning for vaccine clinics onsite over the coming weeks.

5. Does the fourth dose change the definition of who is fully vaccinated?

No, it does not. For the purposes of public health measures, individuals are still defined as fully vaccinated at 14 or more days after receiving their second dose.

6. Will consent be obtained for fourth doses?

Yes, informed consent is needed prior to receiving a fourth dose. Residents can agree to a fourth dose now, and change their mind at any time before the vaccination clinic. Residents can also decide against a fourth dose now, and change their mind later. This decision is completely voluntary. Residents can choose to agree or not to. A residents' decision will not affect their care at the home in any way.

7. What should a staff member or caregiver do if they test positive for COVID-19 or are exposed to a close contact who has presumed or confirmed COVID-19?

Get tested as soon as possible and do not visit a long-term care home for 10 days from your last exposure, symptom onset, or positive test.

Fully vaccinated staff may return to work in a long-term care home sooner than 10 days:

- Staff who have been in close contact with a person who is COVID-positive:
 - PCR tested as soon as possible and may return to work after receiving a negative result. Upon returning to work they must be daily rapid antigen tested until they receive negative PCR test on day 6 or a negative rapid antigen tests on day 6 and 7 (both negative to attend work on day 7 with no restrictions).
- People who have been COVID-positive may be cleared to return early on day 7 if:
 - Negative PCR test on day 6 or negative rapid antigen test on day 6 & 7 (both negative to attend work on day 7).

All cases and symptomatic people and their households and close contacts can access information on what to do next at [Ontario.ca/exposed](https://ontario.ca/exposed), so they can protect themselves and their contacts.

8. Who is considered a close contact?

A close contact is anyone you were less than two metres away from for at least 15 minutes, or multiple shorter lengths of time, without personal protective equipment in the 48 hours before your symptoms began or your positive test result, whichever came first.