

Updates for residents and families in long-term care homes and assisted living facilities

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To keep you informed about the changing information about COVID-19, we'll be preparing this update for residents and families of long-term care homes and assisted living facilities every two weeks.

Many residents in long-term care homes have significant health conditions and are at a much higher risk of developing more severe illness or complications from COVID-19 and are less likely to recover. Equally concerning is the speed at which the virus will spread through a facility if one resident is infected, putting all residents at risk. It's for these reasons there continues to be significant limitations on visiting long-term care homes and assisted living facilities even though other areas are increasing socialization activities. The Provincial Health Office continues to highlight the risk for residents in long-term care homes and assisted living facilities and requires everyone to maintain the current visiting limitations.

Families and caregivers play an important role as supports and coordinators of care for their loved ones. The family and visitor policy protects health-care workers, patients and residents against the threats posed by COVID-19 and maintains public safety, while ensuring patient needs are being met.

Visiting Restrictions – update:

We're committed to ensure the safety of our most valued and vulnerable senior's population living in long term-term care homes and assisted living facilities during COVID-19. Our visitor guidelines follow the direction of the Provincial Health Office and make sure we're protecting residents, staff, and families. Northern Health only permits essential visits and is responsible to determine if a visit is essential. Essential visits include, but are not limited to:

- Visits for compassionate care, including critical illness, palliative care, hospice care, end of life, and Medical Assistance in Dying
- Visits paramount to the patient/client's physical care and mental well-being

Essential visits are limited to one visitor per resident within the facility at a time. A visitor who's a child may be accompanied by one parent, guardian or family member. Visitors shall go directly to the resident they are visiting and exit the facility directly after their visit.

To reduce transmission, all essential visitors must follow proper infection prevention and control measures for COVID-19, including regular hand washing, practicing respiratory (cough) etiquette and maintaining a safe physical distance of at least two metres from patients and staff wherever possible.

Prior to entering, essential visitors will be screened on every visit for respiratory and gastrointestinal symptoms, including COVID-19. All essential visitors entering long-term care facilities must wear a mask, an important precaution to protect those most susceptible to COVID-19.

Visitors will be asked to sign-in upon arrival, and all specific infection prevention and control measures will be communicated to help minimize the transmission of COVID-19 to those most susceptible.

We recognize how these measures have personally impacted seniors, people with disabilities and their families during this unprecedented time. These measures weren't taken lightly and are an important precaution to protect patients, residents and staff from the spread of COVID-19. Virtual visitation is strongly encouraged and should be supported where in-person visitation is not possible.

Communicating to my family member

It's part of Northern Health's commitment to person- and family-centred care that both residents and families receive timely, complete, and accurate information in order to effectively participate in care and decision-making. It's essential that open lines of communication between health care teams, the resident, and their family is established.

How can I communicate with my loved one while they are in a long-term care home or assisted living?

Our teams are working on ways to keep families and residents in touch with each other in a way that will not compromise their safety. A member of your loved one's health care team in the facility will reach out to a resident's spokesperson to create a communication plan. This will include planning for:

- a. How to provide you with resident information/updates
- b. How you want to connect with your loved one (or family member)
- c. How to contact someone in the facility outside of regular business hours

What are some other ways I can communicate with my loved one?

- Bring a cell phone or tablet (and charger) to leave with your loved one to use
- Your loved one can use the facility's phone or available iPads to call you

Northern Health continues to look at creative strategies to increase communication while visiting restrictions are in place. If you have particular strategies you think would work for you and your loved one, please communicate this to their health care team. If you or your loved one do not have access to a phone or tablet, please let your care team know so that alternative options can be discussed to ensure that you are connected to your loved one during their stay.

Resources:

- Essential visitors poster: https://www.northernhealth.ca/sites/northern_health/files/health-information/health-topics/coronavirus/documents/essential-visits.pdf
- All visitors shall be screened for signs and symptoms of illness, including COVID-19, prior to every visit: <http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/covid-19/about-covid-19/symptoms>

For reliable information about COVID-19, we recommend:

- World Health Organization: <https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus>
- The Public Health Agency of Canada: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/coronavirus.html>
- The BC Centre for Disease Control: <http://www.bccdc.ca/Health-Info-Site/Documents/Coronavirus-FAQ-English.pdf>

By working together, we can protect your own health, the health of your loved ones, and the health of Northern Health staff members.

- Northern Health COVID-19 Online Clinic & Information Line: **1-844-645-7811**
- BC Govt. COVID-19 Helpline: **1-888-COVID19** or **1-888-268-4319**