

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

Issue 3 – July 2, 2020

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 could spread through a facility if one resident is infected, putting all residents living in the facility at risk. It's for these reasons there continues to be some limitations on visiting long-term care homes and assisted living facilities.

## Changes to visiting restrictions

We know this has been a difficult situation for everyone involved. We want to acknowledge the challenges to residents and families of not being able to visit face-to-face at this time. We want to thank the tremendous efforts of our residents and families and health care providers in making personal connections in other ways, such as virtual visits.

On June 30, 2020, the Ministry of Health announced changes to the visiting restrictions for long-term care homes and assisted living facilities. It will take time to put these changes into place, including implementing the new safety requirements before allowing additional visitors, especially in the larger facilities.

We ask for the patience of residents, families and staff as we work to develop the required WorkSafe BC safety plans required. Until the safety plans are in place, visits are still restricted to essential visitors only.

These changes are:

1. One designated visitor per resident
2. A safe outside or separate room for visits, or visits in single rooms for residents with mobility issues
3. All visitors must be screened before visiting and must bring and wear **their own** mask (can be non-medical masks)
4. Facilities must make appointments for visits with the visitor

Each facility will have dedicated staff to help with the process. For more information, visit the Northern Health COVID-19 webpage or see the Ministry of Health news release on visitor changes (<https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2020HLTH0211-001207>).

**Note:** If there is a COVID-19 outbreak in a facility, visits including outdoor visitation, personal services, and therapeutic/recreational activities will be stopped.

## Outbreak guidelines in long-term care homes

Northern Health has an in-depth and detailed outbreak plan to respond to any potential outbreaks in our long-term care homes. We have been fortunate to not have any COVID-19 outbreaks in our facilities so far, but we wanted to reassure you that we are ready to respond immediately if the issue arises.

This guideline was developed to help Northern Health long-term care homes to prepare, detect and respond to cases of COVID-19 in their facilities. Managing a COVID-19 outbreak can be challenging. This guideline will ensure that during an outbreak the risk is minimized of passing the virus to other residents, as well as staff members.

COVID-19 is a virus that causes a respiratory and/or systemic illness ranging from common cold-like symptoms to more severe disease. Gastrointestinal symptoms may also occur, but it is less common for these to be the only symptoms. It spreads through droplet and contact transmission and requires appropriate PPE.

Long-term care homes have had other types of outbreaks in the past (e.g. Norovirus) which has given us experience for how to respond to a potential COVID-19 outbreak. In addition, the outbreak guidelines provide a guidance on outbreak prevention and detection, increased resident symptom screening, and enhanced environmental cleaning, testing, and special care of resident(s).

If there is a COVID-19 outbreak in a Northern Health long-term care home, our Medical Health Officers will work with the staff in the home based on direction from Dr. Bonnie Henry, the Provincial Medical Health Officer.

### **Good news stories about long-term care homes and assisted living facilities in Northern Health**

- Classic cars parade through Prince George's long-term care home parking lots: <https://stories.northernhealth.ca/stories/classic-cars-parade-through-prince-georges-long-term-care-home-parking-lots>
- Exceptional care at Gateway Lodge: Compassion, inclusion, and security: <https://stories.northernhealth.ca/stories/exceptional-care-gateway-lodge-compassion-inclusion-and-security>

### **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**

Previous updates for residents and families in long-term care homes and assisted living facilities:

- June 1, 2020: [https://www.northernhealth.ca/sites/northern\\_health/files/services/home-community-care/documents/long-term-care-assisted-living-digest-1.pdf](https://www.northernhealth.ca/sites/northern_health/files/services/home-community-care/documents/long-term-care-assisted-living-digest-1.pdf)
- June 17, 2020: [https://www.northernhealth.ca/sites/northern\\_health/files/services/home-community-care/documents/long-term-care-assisted-living-digest-2.pdf](https://www.northernhealth.ca/sites/northern_health/files/services/home-community-care/documents/long-term-care-assisted-living-digest-2.pdf)