

April 1, 2021

Memorandum To: MCCSS-funded Transfer Payment Recipients (TPRs) and Children's Licenced Outside Paid Resources (OPRs) that provide Services and Supports in Congregate Living Settings

From: Karen Singh
Director, Central Region

Subject: **COVID-19 April 2021 update**

Earlier today, Premier Ford announced that the government will be imposing a provincewide emergency brake, effective April 3, 2021, that will put in place time-limited public health and workplace safety measures to help to stop the rapid transmission of COVID-19 variants in communities, protect hospital capacity and save lives.

I am writing to confirm that during the period of the provincewide emergency brake, current MCCSS COVID-19 guidance for congregate care settings will remain in effect.

This includes:

- MCCSS Visitor's Guidelines 3.0: Re-Opening of Congregate Care Settings
- MCCSS Operational Guidelines for Universal Source Control 2.0
- MCCSS COVID-19 Enhanced Precautions level restrictions/permissions.

Further to this, **no later than April 3, 2021**, all MCCSS-funded congregate living settings are to **implement the ENHANCED precautions** outlined below until further notice by the ministry.

Please share this communication broadly with any/all providers that your organization contracts/sub-contracts with to provide congregate care supports.

Variants of Concern

The March 11, 2021 projections from the Science Advisory and Modelling Consensus tables identified that it is extremely important to remain aware that COVID-19 VOCs are significantly more contagious and continue to spread across Ontario. Our focus must remain on controlling this rate of spread. **We know what works: continued masking and distancing are essential to controlling the spread of VOCs.** In February 2021 the Provincial Infectious Diseases Advisory Committee on Infection Prevention and Control (PIDAC-IPC) estimated that B117 Variant of Concern is **35% to 75% more transmissible** than non-variants. While vaccines are rolling out, extremely rigorous

practice of these IPAC fundamentals is essential to addressing the increased infection risks VOCs pose in congregate care settings.

There is currently an exemption to mask requirements for some resident individuals, including developmental services residents while in their own homes. While the exemption remains in effect, all congregate care settings are being asked, **wherever possible and as appropriate, to encourage residents to wear surgical/procedure masks when they are not alone in their residential space**. The ministry will ensure PPE is made available for each resident and masks can continue to be ordered through the existing [PPE survey](#).

Enhanced Precautions – To be Implemented no later than April 3, 2021

All MCCSS-funded congregate living settings operated by your agency shall implement the following **enhanced precautions**:

Infection Prevention Activities:

- Ensure training has been completed on enhanced PPE protocols during outbreaks.
- Limit resident attendance of indoor community services and supports/day-programming to maximum group size of 5 people (Virtual delivery is **STRONGLY** encouraged as an alternative).

All staff must adhere to enhanced source protection measures by wearing both a surgical/ procedure mask AND eye protection while working within the congregate care setting. Please refer to the *Operational Guideline for COVID-19 Universal Source Control Measures 2.0* document for details about enhanced source control measures.

For information on active screening and IPAC best practices, please visit the Public Health Ontario [website](#) which contains many IPAC tools and resources for various settings.

Visitors and Visiting

- Short-stay absences must be limited to activities that enable health and important life activities (e.g., school, work, doctors' appointments etc.), As a general rule, a resident is expected to practice physical distancing, hand hygiene and to wear a surgical/procedure mask (with support where necessary) when on a short stay absence. Residents must also adhere to any current local public health unit or municipal requirements related to local conditions.
 - Note: specific settings (e.g., schools and offices of regulated medical professionals) may have specific requirements and protocols regarding a short stay absence in those settings.
- Essential visits and essential overnight absences are permitted. “Essential visitors” are distinct from other visitor types in *The Visitor’s Guidelines 3.0: Re-*

Opening of Congregate Living Settings so agencies can facilitate, on an individual resident basis, relationships that are necessary to maintain their health, wellness and safety in the context of overarching visitor restrictions. Agencies are strongly encouraged to consider the importance of the principles of emotional well-being and flexibility for their residents in addition to infection risks.

- Essential visitors must wear a surgical/procedure mask AND eye protection at all times.
- Non-essential and designated indoor visits are prohibited.
- Limited, supervised, non-essential outdoor visits with physical distancing are permitted. Visits must be scheduled in advance and visitors must wear a surgical/procedure mask AND eye protection at all times.
- Note for Youth Justice: All non-essential in person visits (indoor and outdoor) are restricted for youth justice at this time, and the use of technology to promote virtual visits is encouraged. Reintegration leaves for youth in youth justice facilities remain prohibited at this time.

Please continue to consult with The Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services' *Visitor's Guidelines 3.0: Re-Opening of Congregate Living Settings* which provides additional information on outings and visits.

An appendix outlining visitor permissions and restrictions based on community risk has been attached for your use in communicating these expectations to families and friends of residents.

Where in-person day programming and visitation/outings are restricted agencies are encouraged to facilitate virtual access to services and family/friend remote communication.

OTHER MEASURES

The measures above are essential tools to addressing the risks of COVID-19 transmission in MCCSS-funded congregate settings.

While direct interactions connected to the workplace and congregate care settings are key, what we do in our personal lives also contributes directly to infection risks in those settings. All Ontarians including staff of congregate care settings **MUST** adhere strictly to practices in their personal life that help stop the spread of COVID-19.

These practises include maintaining at least 2 meters or 6 ft physical distance from others, using a face masks or covering when outside of your home, rigorous hand and respiratory hygiene, and limiting close contact (within 6 ft or 2 meters) only to people you live with in the same household.

To support these efforts, agencies should supplement these practices by setting measures to maintain and enhance work from home arrangements where it is not essential for employees to attend the workplace.

Staff, volunteers or visitors who are experiencing, or have members of their household experiencing ANY COVID-19 symptoms, even if mild symptoms, should quarantine and follow direction from their local public health unit regarding next steps. COVID-19 testing should be pursued in accordance with current provincial guidelines. Active screening practices at congregate living sites should be similarly rigorous.

We also encourage you, your staff, residents and visitors to download the COVID-19 alert mobile app to support strong contact tracing and help protect yourself and your community.

If you have questions about any of the measures outlined above, please contact your ministry program supervisor.

Sincerely,



Karen Singh
Director, Central Region