

## **Ontario Lifting Some COVID-19 Measures in Long-Term Care Homes**

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*Note: The weekly COVID-19 updates and articles will finish on March 31, 2023. The final weekly update and article will be posted next week.*

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Starting March 31, the province will discontinue some of the measures put in place to reduce the risk of residents catching COVID-19 in Long-Term Care homes ([source](#)).

The province says that this is because many residents in Long-Term Care are vaccinated ([source](#)). Also, COVID-19 antiviral therapies, such as Paxlovid, are free and readily available for people who are at higher-risk of severe health outcomes ([source](#)). Click [here](#) to learn more about COVID-19 antiviral therapy options.

### **What Measures are Staying**

- Required: Staff will continue to monitor residents daily for signs of COVID-19
- Required: Everyone still has to wear masks indoors in Long-Term Care homes
- Recommended: Staff should wear a mask outdoors when they are near a resident ([source](#)).

### **What Measures are No Longer Required or Recommended**

- Daily temperature checks or screening of residents returning from an absence (i.e., time away from the Long-Term Care home)
- COVID-19 testing for staff, caregivers, and visitors who aren't showing symptoms
- Wearing masks outdoors is not required for residents, caregivers, and visitors
- The limit of one caregiver at a time during a COVID-19 outbreak
- The limit of one caregiver at a time when a resident is showing symptoms or isolating
- Physical distancing requirements during social and physical activities ([source](#)).

In addition, the province encourages Long-Term Care homes to “revisit their policies and consider allowing visitors and qualified staff, regardless of their vaccination status” ([source](#)).

In other words, the government recommends allowing unvaccinated people to work in Long-Term Care homes again. Their reasoning: “They will also help ensure people living in Long-Term Care get the quality of care and quality of life they need, and that valuable staff time and resources are focused on resident care and effective infection prevention and control practices” ([source](#)). Essentially, this decision is influenced by staff shortages, which is affecting the quality of care that residents receive.

This encouragement to allow unvaccinated people to work closely with residents in Long-Term Care can be upsetting for many people to hear, especially since at least 5,335 nursing home residents and 13 Long-Term Care healthcare workers have died from COVID-19 since the pandemic hit Ontario in early 2020 ([source](#)).

This is also concerning considering that two senior government sources told the Canadian Press that the three paid sick days for workers during the pandemic will also be discontinued at the end of March ([source](#)). A Ministry of Labour spokesperson confirmed that the three paid sick days are ending on March 31, stating that they were only a temporary measure that is now no longer necessary due to high vaccination rates ([source](#)). A lack of paid sick days could force low-income employees in many sectors to go into work when they are feeling unwell because they cannot afford to take time off.

## Final Thoughts

The Chief Medical Officer of Health Dr. Kieran Moore stated, “The health and safety of [Long-Term Care] residents remains paramount, and we will continue to work with the sector to ensure residents and their families receive the level of care they need and deserve, in a safe and comfortable environment” ([source](#)).

According to the press release, the Ontario government will continue to work closely with Dr. Moore to monitor the pandemic to keep homes safe for residents and staff ([source](#)).

This upcoming change is just one part of a “phased approach to updating COVID-19 measures for people living in, working in or visiting long-term care homes” ([source](#)).

Although these weekly updates will no longer be continuing, you can find future updates on this topic at this link: <https://news.ontario.ca/mltc/en>. If you want to make a complaint about a Long-Term Care home, click [here](#) to learn more.

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If you think you may be experiencing symptoms of COVID-19, take the self-assessment at [www.ontario.ca/coronavirus](http://www.ontario.ca/coronavirus). Follow all directions from your medical provider or your local health unit at the following phone numbers:

Health Connect Ontario: 811

Telehealth Ontario: 1-866-797-0000

Toronto Public Health: 416-338-7600

Peel Public Health: 905-799-7700

Durham Region Health Department: 905-668-7711

York Region Public Health: 1-877-464-9675