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December 24th, 2021

Dear Long-Term Care Operators:

On December 21st, 2021 the Provincial Health Officer and the Ministry of Health announced updated requirements for visitation in long-term care (LTC). In recognition of the increased transmissibility of the Omicron variant of concern and given the vulnerability of residents in LTC even when fully vaccinated themselves, individuals visiting LTC homes (both essential and social visitors) must be screened for COVID-19 by receiving a rapid point-of-care (POC) test prior to their visit.

Rapid POC tests provide the opportunity to rapidly screen people for COVID-19, with results ready in approximately 20 minutes. These tests can help reduce the potential for introduction and spread of COVID-19 in LTC. The rapid POC screening requirement for all visitors is **in addition to** the current requirements for visitors to be fully vaccinated and to adhere to infection prevention and control measures. Visitors who receive a positive rapid POC test result, choose not to receive a rapid POC test, or who do not demonstrate that they are fully vaccinated will not be able to enter a LTC facility, including passing through the facility to access an outdoor space. There are no exceptions to the rapid POC screening requirement based on medical exemption from vaccination, essential or social visitor status, including compassionate visits related to end-of-life. The rapid POC screening requirement in LTC excludes children under age 12.

Rapid POC testing will begin at LTC homes when they have received their POC test kits and are prepared to begin testing. It is anticipated that all sites in the province will have received kits and begin testing by January 7, 2022. The Ministry of Health will communicate further guidance over the coming days to support these new requirements.

LTC operators will receive a supply of rapid POC test kits through the central distribution organized and lead by the Provincial Health Services Authority (PHSA). In preparation for receiving an initial supply of rapid POC test kits, LTC operators are to implement the following processes based on the provincial [Rapid COVID-19 Point-of-Care Testing Program](#):

- Review the guidance and establish processes related to the specific type of rapid POC test kits being used at the site. Test kit guidelines are available through the [Rapid COVID-19 Point-of-Care Testing Program](#).
- Identify the site POC coordinator(s)/lead(s) to organize and support staff training and supervision, testing reporting requirements, overseeing data collection, quality assurance activities, ordering of supplies, and infection prevention and control practices for the established rapid POC testing area.
- Identify and train additional staff for the tester and sample collector roles as described in the test kit guidelines available through the [Rapid COVID-19 Point-of-Care Testing Program](#).

Once the LTC operator has received a supply of rapid POC test kits and staff are trained to conduct POC testing, rapid POC screening for all visitors as part of the overall visitor screening processes will begin. It is anticipated that all LTC sites in BC will be implementing rapid POC screening by January 7, 2022.

- Visitors who receive a negative test result, provide proof of full vaccination, and are compliant with masking requirements and other infection control practices will be able to enter a facility.
- Visitors who are screened as having symptoms or who receive a positive test result will not be able to enter a facility. Staff should provide information for the visitor to self-isolate and seek further direction from public health. Operators are required to report all positive test results to public health.
- Individuals who receive an inconclusive test result will be required to undergo another rapid POC test.
- There are no exceptions to the rapid POC screening requirement based on medical exemption from vaccination, essential or social visitor status, including compassionate visits related to end-of-life. Rapid POC screening in LTC excludes children under age 12.

Thank you again for all your hard work to provide long-term care and seniors' assisted living services during this challenging time. Please continue to monitor the BC Centre for Disease Control website on COVID-19 for updates, information, and resources: www.bccdc.ca/covid19.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'RHW', is positioned above the typed name.

Ross Hayward
a/Assistant Deputy Minister
Health Services Division