**Tenants Re-Engaging in Community Life**

**Homes for Special Care and Community Homes for Opportunity**

**July 17, 2020**

Preventing the transmission of COVID-19 has been a key priority across Ontario. Safety precautions implemented in congregate living settings, including Homes for Special Care (HSC) and Community Homes for Opportunity (CHO), have resulted in tenants remaining in their home for some months. As cases decline in Ontario and the province begins to re-open, questions have been raised about tenants safely re-engaging in community life.

While Ontario is seeing a decrease in COVID-19 cases, the province has asked that everyone continue to be vigilant, maintain physical distancing, and when physical distancing is not possible that a face covering be worn.

This document is intended to be a guide to be used together with the [COVID-19 Guidance: Congregate Living for Vulnerable Populations](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/docs/2019_congregate_living_guidance.pdf) and other [Public Health Ontario COVID-19 Resources for Congregate Living Settings](https://www.publichealthontario.ca/en/diseases-and-conditions/infectious-diseases/respiratory-diseases/novel-coronavirus/congregate-living-settings-resources). Where there is a discrepancy between this document and other ministry or public health documents, official Ontario Ministry of Health COVID-19 directives or Emergency Orders take precedent.

The purpose of this document is to minimize or eliminate the risk of COVID-19 infecting tenants, workers or homeowners when tenants choose to, or need to, leave their home. Homes and tenants must do their best to balance individual tenant rights provided by the Residential Tenancies Act, with the safety of the home and all the tenants in the home. In a pandemic, tenants have responsibility to act in ways that help to keep each other safe.

**Tenants Safely Leaving the Homes**

Use a Harm Reduction approach. In this context, this means taking a tenant-centred approach that seeks to reduce the health harms/risk associated with leaving the home, without necessarily requiring people to stay home. Being isolated in the home comes with its own risks to tenants’ mental and physical health and this needs to be considered.

Consider the Following:

Assessment of risk for individual tenants

* + Take an individualized approach to planning for safe visits out of the home
  + Consider that some tenants may practice riskier behaviour than others
  + Degree of support provided should be dependent on the risk to the individual and to others in the home

Assessment of risk for location of home

* + Some areas of the province have more COVID-19 cases and therefore visits outside the home may be more or less risky, depending on the location of the home
  + It is important to monitor the number of COVID-19 cases in the local areas -- changes in the number of COVID-19 cases in a local area should be considered when assessing the risks of participation in community life outside the home

For safe visits outside the home, offer support, advice and the most up to date information related to COVID-19 and its risks, consistent with that provided to everyone in the province including:

1. Self-monitor for symptoms of COVID-19;
2. Practice physical distancing (keep 2 metres apart from another person);
3. When physical distancing is not possible, use non-medical masks;
4. Practice proper hand hygiene and cover mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing.
5. Self-monitor for symptom of COVID-19

* Provide education for tenants about the [symptoms of COVID-19](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/docs/2019_reference_doc_symptoms.pdf) and encourage tenants to self-monitor for symptoms

1. Practice Physical Distancing
   * Some tenants may need support and education on [physical distancing](https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/ncov/factsheet/factsheet-covid-19-guide-physical-distancing.pdf?la=en)
   * Begin outings in small groups of two or three with support so it is manageable
   * Have activities outside wherever possible as the risk of transmission is less outside
   * Practice physical distancing in transportation, wear non-medical masks and open windows where feasible. Consider the purchase of car shields (plexiglass between the front and back seats) in vehicles that will be used to transport tenants
   * Encourage tenants to avoid crowded areas and choose less busy times to go outdoors
2. When Physical Distancing is Not Possible, Encourage Tenants to Use a Non-Medical Mask
   * Consider Public Health Ontario’s latest recommendations [to the general public about masking](https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/ncov/factsheet/2020/05/factsheet-covid-19-non-medical-masks.pdf?la=en)
   * Consider purchasing cloth masks for tenants where these masks can be properly maintained
   * For tenants or homes that cannot manage the care of cloth masks, supply surgical/procedure masks for visits outside the home
   * For appointments, both the tenant and the service provider should wear a mask
   * Tenants should wear a mask when in transit, including public transit or when being driven in a car
   * Masks should not be used by those who cannot tolerate them or have breathing problems, or those who cannot remove them themselves
3. Practice Proper Hand Hygiene

* Tenants should be encouraged to try not to touch surfaces and objects touched by others while out of the home and avoid touching their face
* Hands should be washed frequently throughout the day and clean towels or disposable towels should be made available
* If it is not possible to wash hands with soap and water, make available alcohol-based hand sanitizers with 60% - 90% alcohol
* Consider placing hand sanitizers throughout the home to encourage frequent hand hygiene
* Consider purchasing refillable travel size hand sanitizer for tenants to carry when out of the home to use as required
* First thing upon return to the home, support tenants to [practice proper hand hygiene](https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/ncov/factsheet/factsheet-covid-19-hand-hygiene.pdf?la=en)

Tenants who are returning to the facility after a same day appointment or other off-site visit generally do not need special measures. Tenants should be encouraged to take the precautions outlined above. Monitoring of residents for symptom of COVID-19 should be conducted twice daily as per usual practice.

**Resuming Family Visits**

Note: All visitors must be [screened](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/docs/2019_patient_screening_guidance.pdf). Only visitors who have no COVID-19 symptoms and who pass screening should be permitted to visit. Family visitors are not required to have a COVID-19 test prior to visiting.

Outside

During nice weather in the summer, it is best to hold visits with family outside where risk of transmission is low. Maintain physical distancing of two metres. Wear non-medical masks where physical distancing is not maintained. If possible, place comfortable chairs or picnic tables outdoors in a shady area or under an umbrella to make the visit as comfortable as possible.

Inside

If outside visits are not possible, arrange family visits inside in a designated area in the home. Visits are not to happen in a bedroom that is shared.

Maintain a log of all visitors, including family visitors, who enter the home including:

* Name, date of visit, with whom they visit, and their contact information.

Family visits are allowed only if the home has no COVID-positive cases.

Visitors entering the home should be screened in accordance with the screening section in the [COVID-19 Guidance: Congregate Living for Vulnerable Populations](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/docs/2019_congregate_living_guidance.pdf).

Maintain physical distance (2 metres) between family visitors and tenants.

Both the tenant and the family visitors should wear non-medical masks for the duration of the visit. Family visitors should bring their own mask. If they don’t have a mask, offer a disposable face mask to the family visitor.

Overnight Visits to the Family

Overnight visits to family are not encouraged during this time due to the risk of bringing COVID-19 back into the home.

Discuss the concerns and the potential impact on the entire home with tenants and families and assess risk prior to decisions. Consider the individual tenant’s mental health and their need to visit family.

If an overnight visit is going to take place, ensure that families are in agreement with adhering to the safety precautions outlined in this document. Consider asking for their written commitment about this. For longer overnight stays, COVID-19 testing of family members, and the tenant prior to return to the home, can be used to assist in minimizing risk.

In instances where a resident has been away from the home overnight or longer and safety precautions have not been taken, this situation should be treated like a new admission, including the need for them to self-isolate for 14 days. See [COVID-19 Guidance: Congregate Living for Vulnerable Populations](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/docs/2019_congregate_living_guidance.pdf). This is not to be used as a punitive measure.

**Tenants Returning to Work**

A homeowner and tenant should understand the risks associated with the work environment of a tenant who is returning to work. Extra planning and action may be required to minimize the risks. Where a tenant is returning to the workplace, encourage tenants to practice precautions set out in the “Tenants Safely Leaving the Homes” section on pages 1 - 3 including:

* self-monitor for symptoms of COVID-19;
* practicing physical distancing;
* wear a non-medical mask when physical distancing is not possible; and
* practice proper hand hygiene throughout the day and on return to the home.

Screen the tenant for symptoms upon return to the home. Provide education to tenants about self-monitoring for symptoms.

Provide working tenants with single bedrooms if operationally feasible.

If the work involves contact with other people, encourage the tenant to wear a mask at work. Encourage the tenant to get a COVID-19 test on a regular basis (every two weeks).

**Public Health Ontario**

Public Health Ontario has resources for congregate living settings on its [website](https://www.publichealthontario.ca/en/diseases-and-conditions/infectious-diseases/respiratory-diseases/novel-coronavirus/congregate-living-settings-resources).

**Local Public Health Unit**

If you have any questions, concerns or are concerned that someone has COVID-19 or symptoms, please reach out to your local public health unit as soon as possible.

Don’t hesitate to consult your local public health unit if you have any questions about putting in place measures to mitigate the risk of a COVID-19 outbreak in your home.

**Plan and Prepare for COVID-19 Wave 2**

It is unclear how long this COVID-19 pandemic will last. It is recommended that homes and tenants continue to be vigilant and practice physical distancing, minimize attendance at events, locations, businesses where physical distancing is not possible.

It is also recommended that homes begin to consider developing plans for a COVID-19 Wave 2. This may include putting a plan in place that homes may have had in place in March and April if necessary. Consider making available media, social media and other ways for tenants to maintain communications, relationships and other important social contact that may assist with maintaining good mental health and assist to keep people at home should a Wave 2 occur.