

Ministry of Children Community
and Social Services

Resuming Visits in Congregate Living Settings



Resuming Visits in Congregate Living Settings

Introduction

On April 23, 2020 the government released its COVID-19 Action Plan for Vulnerable People. The Action Plan included limiting non-essential visitors in congregate living settings, as an important step to reduce exposure and prevent the spread of COVID-19.

On May 28, 2020, the Ministry of Health Guidance: Congregate Living for Vulnerable Populations was released and provided further recommendations that congregate living settings develop policies that limit non-essential visitors. It was also recommended that an operational definition of “essential visitor” be defined in policy, which could include “a person performing essential support services, such as health care services, a parent/guardian, a person visiting a very ill or palliative resident, or a maintenance worker”.

Further guidance was provided from MCCSS via memo to all funded congregate living settings:

- An essential visitor is generally a person (including a contractor) who performs essential services to support the ongoing operation of a service agency or is a person considered necessary by a service agency to maintain the health, wellness and safety, or any applicable legal rights, of a resident.
- Who is considered an essential visitor and the way in which the visit is exercised (e.g. in-person, virtual) may change depending on whether there is an active outbreak, the nature of the congregate living setting, the individuals served, as well as advice provided by a local public health unit.
- Agency employers should take careful consideration as to when and whether an in-person visitor is truly vital to maintain the health, wellness and safety of a resident. This should include whether the support or care provided by the visitor can be reasonably, safely, and fully assumed by agency staff.

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- For residents under the age of 18, employers should take all measures to ensure ongoing visitation rights are maintained in compliance with requirements under the Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017. Consideration should be given to using virtual visits.
- A log of all essential visitors who are given entry, with whom they visit, and/or what areas of the residence they occupy should be maintained.
- All visitors are to be actively screened for COVID-19 symptoms, to maintain infection prevention and control (IPAC) standards and to wear masks for source protection.

For congregate living settings in adult Developmental Services, Violence Against Women, Anti-Human Trafficking, and Intervenor Services sectors, Ontario Regulation 177/20 under the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act **requires** that recommendations of the COVID-19 Guidance: Congregate Living for Vulnerable Populations be followed.

Although the direction on non-essential visitors does not place a blanket prohibition on all visitors, it is intended to greatly limit entry into the congregate living setting to help prevent transmission of COVID-19 and to protect residents and staff during the outbreak. The role that families, visitors and loved ones play in providing caregiving and emotional supports is important in the quality of life for those living in congregate living settings. To support visits while protecting residents and staff, the ministry is proposing resumption of personal visits, provided they take place outdoors and are guided by the following principles:

- ✓ **Safety:** Any approach to visiting in a congregate living setting must consider, balance, and meet the health and safety needs of residents, staff, and visitors, and ensure risks are mitigated.

- ✓ **Emotional Well-being:** Allowing visitors is intended to support the emotional wellbeing of residents and their families/friends, through reducing any potential negative impacts related to social isolation. Homes must make every effort to ensure that visits are meaningful and equitable by scheduling visits of a sufficient duration and maintaining the visiting schedule. Any cancellations should be due to extraordinary circumstances.
- ✓ **Equitable Access:** All individuals seeking to visit a resident be given equitable visitation access, consistent with resident preference and within reasonable restrictions that safeguard residents.
- ✓ **Flexibility:** The physical/infrastructure characteristics of the congregate living setting and/or nearby public space, and its current status with respect to staffing, and any other key factors must be considered.

Visitors should consider their personal health and susceptibility to the virus in determining whether visiting is appropriate. Where it is not possible or advisable for in-person visits homes should continue to provide virtual visiting options.

As the COVID-19 outbreak evolves across the province, the direction regarding visits will be adjusted as necessary keeping the safety, health and emotional wellbeing of residents and staff as the priority.

Entrance by essential visitors necessary to the ongoing operation of the home (e.g. maintenance workers) can continue at the discretion of the agency.

Congregate Living Setting Requirements

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The baseline requirements for the congregate living setting must be met prior to the home being able to accept any personal visitors:

1. -The setting must NOT be currently in outbreak.
2. -The congregate living setting has established:
 - a) - **Procedures for the resumption of visits** and a process for communicating these procedures with residents, families, visitors and staff, including but not limited to infection prevention and control (IPAC), scheduling and any setting-specific policies.
 - i. - This process must include sharing an information package and educating visitors on IPAC, masking, physical distancing of a minimum of 2 metres (6 feet), and other operational procedures such as ensuring visitors' agreement to comply. The setting's policy must include an approach to dealing with non-adherence to policies and procedures, including the discontinuation of visits.
 - b) - Protocols in place to maintain the highest of IPAC standards prior to, during and after visits.
3. -A dedicated outdoor area has been identified where visitors can meet with loved ones, that allows for a minimum of 2 metres (6 feet) physical distance. The area must be thoroughly disinfected after every visit.
4. -Staff must be available to transfer residents out of and into the congregate living setting and remain within visual contact of the visitor and resident for the full duration of the visit. Any concerns regarding the visit must be documented.

5. List of visitors should be maintained and available for relevant\appropriate staff members to access.
6. A schedule must be created that allows for:
 - a. Maximum of 2 visitors at a time per resident.
 - b. Time-limited visits, but not restricted to less than 30 minutes.
 - c. At minimum one visit per week per resident.
 - d. Staffing and space capacity (or appropriate nearby public space) to maintain safety of residents, staff and visitors.
 - e. Enhanced cleaning in between visit space use.

Visitor Requirements



7. Visitor Requirements

All visitors must adhere to the following:

1. Must pass active screening every time they are on the premises and attest that they are not experiencing any of the typical and atypical symptoms of COVID-19. They should not be allowed to visit if they do not pass the screening.
2. Attest to home staff that the visitor has tested negative for COVID-19 within the previous 2 weeks and subsequently not tested positive. The home is not responsible for providing the testing.
3. Comply with the congregate setting's IPAC protocols, including proper use of face masks.
 - a. Visitors should use a face covering at all times. This may include a cloth mask while maintaining a minimum of 2 metres (6 feet) physical distance. Visitors are responsible for bringing their own face covering.
 - b. Visitors must maintain a minimum of 2 metres (6 feet) physical distance from the resident for the full duration of the visit.
 - c. Visitors must adhere to protocols for hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette.

4. Gifts are permitted, only if in accordance with existing policies and procedures of the setting, and only if they can be easily cleaned and disinfected (e.g. hard surfaces, original packaging).
5. At no time may the non-essential visitor enter to congregate living setting.

Any non-adherence to these rules will be the basis for discontinuation of visits.