

Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services

Visitor's Guidelines 2.0: Re-Opening of Congregate Living Settings

A. Introduction

On April 23, 2020, the government released its [COVID-19 Action Plan for Vulnerable Ontarians](#). This included guidance on limiting non-essential visitors in congregate living settings to reduce exposure and prevent the spread of COVID-19. The Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) issued the following subsequent guidance for congregate living settings:

- *MCCSS Visitor's Guidelines: Re-Opening of Congregate Living Settings* (Effective July 22, 2020); and
- [MCCSS Re-Opening of Congregate Living Settings: Short-Stay Absences and Outings and Essential Overnight Absences](#) (Effective August 28, 2020)

This revised document combines these previous guidelines and provides updated direction on the following:

- Essential, Non-Essential and Designated Visitors

Important note for Transfer Payment Recipients (TPRs) providing youth justice congregate care services. The Ministry's Youth Justice Division continues to work with key stakeholders on operational guidance with respect to the safety, security and confidentiality of the youth we serve, their families, and employees with a goal of resuming in-person visits. Communication will be distributed to all TPRs providing open and secure youth justice services once in-person visits can resume.

The continuation of indoor visits, short stay absences, and essential overnight absences should be guided by the following principles:

- ✓ **Safety:** Any approach to visiting inside a congregate living setting should consider the health and safety needs of residents, staff, and visitors, and ensure risks are mitigated.
- ✓ **Emotional Well-Being:** Accommodating visitors is intended to support the emotional well-being of residents and their families/friends by reducing any potential negative impacts related to social isolation.

- ✓ **Equitable Access:** Visits should be conducted equitably and consistent with resident preference and within reasonable restrictions that safeguard residents and staff.
- ✓ **Flexibility:** Any approach to visits should consider COVID-19 spread in their community and the physical/infrastructure characteristics of the site, its staffing availability, and the current status of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) levels for staff and residents.

Agencies should encourage residents and visitors to consider their personal health and susceptibility to the virus in determining whether visiting a congregate living setting is appropriate. Where in-person visits are not appropriate or advisable, virtual visiting options should be provided.

As the outbreak evolves in Ontario MCCSS will keep the health, safety and emotional well-being of residents and staff at the forefront by continuing to adjust direction regarding visits and absences at congregate living settings.

B. Congregate Living Setting Requirements

The following baseline requirements for congregate living settings must be met prior to the site being able to accept visitors:

1. For non-essential and designated visitors, the congregate living site must NOT be currently in outbreak (i.e. at least one active COVID-19 case among a resident or staff member).
 - a. In the event that a site experiences an outbreak, all non-essential and designated visits must end. In accordance with prior operational direction, sites in outbreak must establish compliance with all Chief Medical Officer of Health (CMOH) directives for congregate living settings in outbreak and follow directions from the local public health unit (PHU).
2. For all visits, the agency has established:
 - a. A process for communicating with residents, families/friends and staff about the resumption of on-site visits and the associated procedures, including but not limited to infection prevention and control (IPAC), scheduling and any site-specific policies.
 - i. This process must include sharing an information package with visitors on IPAC, masking and other operational procedures such as limiting movement inside the congregate living setting, if applicable, and restricting visitor use of the washroom (except for hand hygiene purposes) and ensuring visitors' agreement to comply prior to each visit. Supporting materials must include an approach to dealing with non-

- adherence to these policies and procedures, including the discontinuation of visits.
 - b. Dedicated areas for both indoor and outdoor visits.
 - c. A list/log of visitor available for relevant staff to access.
3. Protocols are in place to maintain the highest of IPAC standards prior to, during and after visits, which include:
- a. All visitors (essential, designated and non-essential) must wear a face covering (non-medical mask) when visiting inside or outside the site and maintain proper respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene. Hand washing should be followed for all visitors and residents before and after visiting;
 - b. Education on all required protocols will be provided by the site;
 - c. There are designated spaces outdoors and indoors (as applicable);
 - d. There is adequate staffing to implement the protocols related to visitations (alongside continuation of ongoing operations within the setting);
 - e. Enhanced cleaning and disinfection of the space will occur following recommended IPAC standards;
 - f. Where appropriate, the congregate living setting is able to facilitate visits in a manner aligned with physical distancing protocols, including identifying a space(s) where visiting takes place and the areas that are off-limits to visitors (e.g. bathrooms (except for hand hygiene purposes as needed), common areas, etc.); and,
 - g. Any non-adherence to these rules could be the basis for discontinuation of visits.

Please refer to [Appendix A: Types of Visitors \(Essential, Designated & Non-Essential\)](#) for additional information.

C. Visitor Requirements

For each visit:

1. **All visitors** must pass an active screening questionnaire that screens for signs and symptoms of and potential exposures to COVID-19.

Note: Previous requirements stating that all non-essential (i.e. family, friend) visitors attest that they tested negative for COVID-19 within the previous 2 weeks and subsequently not tested positive are **no longer** required.

2. Read and agree to the parameters of the visit set out by the agency in compliance with this document and public health direction.
3. Comply with the congregate living setting's infection, prevention and control (IPAC) protocols, including proper use of face coverings (non-medical masks).
4. Visitors should use a face covering (non-medical mask) AT ALL TIMES during the visit regardless of whether it is conducted indoors or outdoors. Non-essential visitors are responsible for bringing their own face covering (non-medical mask) for visits.
5. Designated and Non-essential visitors must remain within designated spaces as identified by the agency.

Any non-adherence to the site's infection prevention and control policies, including but not limited to above, may be grounds for discontinuation of visits.

Physical contact between the resident and **designated or non-essential visitors** (e.g. kissing or hugging) is not recommended as the best method of preventing transmission of COVID-19 is through physical distancing. However, in situations where physical distancing is not possible and/or physical contact is unavoidable, both the resident and the non-essential or designated visitor(s) must wear a face covering (non-medical mask) as well as follow rigorous hand hygiene before and after any contact.

It is recommended that the [COVID-19: Personal Protective Equipment \(PPE\) and Non-Medical Masks in Congregate Living Settings](#) and the [Public Health Ontario Risk Algorithm to Guide PPE Use](#) be referred to in order to determine appropriate PPE based on the nature of the physical contact.

D. Requirements for Short-Stay Absences & Outings

The resumption of short-stay absences, outings and community engagement and participation is important to maintain the social, emotional well-being and quality of life of people residing in congregate living settings. Residents should be given equitable access to outings and community participation consistent with residents' preferences and within reasonable restrictions that safeguard both residents and staff.

These principles are consistent with efforts underway to support people and communities as the province re-opens, while balancing the need for continued protections to stop the spread of COVID-19.

For congregate living residents who wish to leave the site for a short stay absence or outing (e.g., outing with friends or family, school attendance as applicable, shopping, errands, appointments, etc.), the following requirements must be met:

- Residents must pass an active screening questionnaire that screens for signs and symptoms of and potential exposures to COVID-19 every time they re-enter the congregate living site, which is in addition to also being required to be screened twice daily. If a resident does not pass screening, the site will follow isolation policies.
- The resident performs proper hand hygiene upon exit and entry of congregate living site as well as maintains hand hygiene (e.g./ uses hand sanitizer regularly including upon entry/exit of buildings/spaces) while in the community and uses hand hygiene after touching objects or surfaces that could be touched by others or after touching others.
- The resident wears a face covering (non-medical mask) (cloth mask is acceptable) when entering indoor spaces or when they are within 6 feet / 2 metres of others in outdoor spaces. In addition, the resident should be encouraged to adhere to physical distancing practices as much as possible as well as adhere to any current local public health unit advice related to local conditions and requirements.
- As much as possible, residents should avoid crowded indoor places, and interactions with multiple people. Masks should only be removed indoors to eat or drink, and then immediately put back on afterwards.
- Agencies should assist people in obtaining face coverings (non-medical masks) to facilitate the use of the masks during the resident's short-stay absence.

For information on how to wear, remove and handle non-medical mask or face-coverings please refer to the following resources:

- [Public Health Ontario advice on non-medical masks/face coverings](#)
- Government of Ontario [website for Face Coverings and Face Masks](#)
- Health Canada: [How to wear a non-medical mask or face covering properly \(video\)](#)

NOTE: All children and young persons receiving residential care have a right to receive an education that corresponds to their aptitudes and ability, in a community setting wherever possible. With the return to school in September 2020, children's residential service providers are to engage with the children and youth in their care, placing agencies, school boards, and parents or guardians where applicable to discuss the options for children and youth to return to school. Specific guidance for the school setting has been provided by the Ministry of Education and School Boards.

E. Essential Overnight Absences

An essential overnight absence (e.g. to a family home) is one considered necessary to maintain the health, wellness and safety, or any applicable legal rights, of a resident. Agencies should take careful consideration to support residents' emotional well-being

through overnight absences.

A resident returning from an essential overnight absence must upon return, while in the congregate living setting, follow enhanced precautions for 14-days post essential overnight visit, including:

- Upon return, pass an active screening questionnaire that screens for signs and symptoms of and potential exposures to COVID-19;
- Only receive outdoor visitors during the 14 days;
- Monitor for symptoms;
- Avoid using common areas; however, if a common area cannot be avoided, the resident must use a face covering (non-medical mask);
- Limit contact with other residents;
- Only participate in group activities if physical distancing is maintained (i.e., a distance of 6 feet or 2 metres) and the use of a face covering (non-medical mask);
- Practice proper hand hygiene by washing their hands often (using soap and water, or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer);
- Adhere to respiratory etiquette; and,
- Continue to follow appropriate physical distancing guidelines (i.e., maintaining a distance of 6 feet or 2 metres).

Residents who are following the 14-day of enhanced precautions may leave their congregate living setting for short stay (non-overnight) absences/outings (e.g. go to school, go on walks and other activities of daily living) following the precautions outlined in Section B.

Leaving the residence for a short stay absence/outing will NOT reset the 14-day time period. However, another overnight stay during the same 14-day period will reset the 14-day period.

NOTE: The enhanced precautions for 14-days is not to be applied to an individual who has previously had a laboratory confirmed case of COVID-19 and have subsequently recovered. Testing/isolation following such absences should be done in consultation with the local public health unit, taking into consideration any symptoms at the time of return to the congregate living setting or new high-risk exposures.

F. Timeline

The direction in this guidance will come into effect on September 9, 2020.

Appendix A: Types of Visitors (Essential, Designated and Non-Essential)

Essential Visitors

An essential visitor is generally a person who:

1. Performs essential services to support the ongoing operation of a service agency (including a contractor); and/or
2. Considered necessary to maintain the health, wellness and safety, or any applicable legal rights, of a congregate living resident.

An essential visitor may include but is not limited to the following:

- A parent/guardian
- Social service workers (e.g./ child welfare workers, day program operators etc.)
- Health care providers (e.g./ doctor, nurse, personal support workers etc.)
- Inspectors from the Ministry or public health unit

Designated Visitors

A resident and/or substitute decision maker may designate up to 2 people at a time as “unrestricted visitors”.

Designated Visitors:

- Are not required to schedule an appointment to visit a congregate living setting within provided that their visit is within the site’s permitted visitation hours.
- May be required to wait outside of the congregate living setting if the site is at its maximum visitor capacity.

While appointments are not required it is advised that to schedule an appointment to avoid wait times.

Additional requirements:

- The site must not be in an outbreak. In the event that a site experiences an outbreak, all unrestricted visits must end.

Non-Essential Visitor

A non- essential visitor is generally a person who:

- Provides non-essential services, who may or may not be hired by the site or the resident and/or their substitute decision maker; and/or
- For social reasons (e.g. family members or friends).

Additional requirements:

- Non-essential visitors are required to make an appointment prior to visiting a congregate living setting.
- The site must not be in an outbreak. In the event that a site experiences an outbreak, all non-essential visits must end.

Note: Staff are not considered visitors.