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December 9, 2024

MEMO TO: Retirement Home Operators and Licensees
FROM: Michèle Sanborn, Assistant Deputy Minister
Policy, Programs and Strategic Partnerships Division
Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility

SUBJECT: Holiday 2024 Reminders for the Retirement Home Sector

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As the holiday season approaches, this is a friendly reminder for operators about the recommended actions to help ensure a safe and joyful time for retirement home staff, residents, and their families.

We encourage everyone to stay mindful as respiratory virus infections, including COVID-19, Influenza and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), are expected to rise over the holiday season. With residents likely attending more social gatherings, the potential for outbreaks may increase. In the past two years, we have observed a noticeable uptick in retirement home outbreaks following the winter holidays. To help safeguard residents and minimize the risk of outbreaks, we kindly encourage operators to consider the following measures.

Infection Prevention and Control (IPAC)

With the holiday season bringing an increase in visitors to retirement homes, operators are encouraged to take proactive steps to reinforce Infection Prevention and Control (IPAC) measures. This includes focusing on foundational practices such as hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette, and frequent cleaning and disinfection of common areas. While masks are not required when a retirement home is not in outbreak, they are still recommended for visitors who are not healthcare workers.

The Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health and Public Health recommend, as outlined in MSAA's COVID-19 Guidance, that retirement homes display passive signage outside of the home. Operators may also wish to share regular updates about safety measures during the holiday season with residents, their families, and visitors. Encouraging visitors to stay home if they are feeling unwell can further support efforts to navigate the winter season successfully.

Operators are also encouraged to review the resources shared through the fall preparedness memo and webinar from September 2024. These resources include helpful

information and available supports such as vaccines, antivirals, personal protective equipment, and rapid antigen tests.

Retirement home IPAC leads seeking additional guidance with implementing best practices are welcome to connect with their local public health units or reach out to their nearest IPAC Hub. For assistance in locating your local IPAC Hub, please email IPACHubs@ontario.ca.

Vaccination

Staying up to date with vaccines remains one of the most effective ways to reduce the risk of severe outcomes. Operators are encouraged to highlight the benefits of Influenza, COVID-19, and RSV vaccines to residents, staff, and visitors, as applicable. Sharing information about these vaccines and their availability can help ensure residents are aware of nearby clinics and have the opportunity to stay protected.

Emergency Preparedness

As winter approaches, operators are encouraged to review their emergency preparedness plans to ensure readiness for potential weather-related challenges. It is a good time to confirm that essential supplies, such as food, water, medications, and backup power sources, are readily available to support residents during extreme winter weather events. Operators may also wish to revisit contingency staffing plans to help ensure adequate staff coverage during potential outbreaks, emergencies, or the busy holiday season.

Thank you for your continued efforts in supporting the smooth operation of retirement homes and prioritizing the safety and well-being of residents and staff.

If you have any questions, please contact our team at RHinquiries@ontario.ca.

Sincerely,

Original signed by

Michèle Sanborn

c: Melissa Thomson, Deputy Minister, MSAA and MLTC
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