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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: Measles in Ontario and Spring Update on the 2025-26 COVID-19 and RSV Vaccine Programs

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I am writing to share an update on the current measles outbreak in Ontario and to provide details on the 2025–26 Spring COVID-19 and RSV vaccine programs.

1. Measles

As you may be aware, there has been a recent increase in measles cases, particularly in southwestern Ontario. This largely affects unvaccinated or under-vaccinated children in communities with historically low immunization rates. This has led to increased vigilance and the implementation of proactive public health measures[1].

The risk of measles to retirement home residents is considered extremely low, as most individuals born before 1970 are likely immune due to natural infection during a time of widespread measles circulation (Measles: For health professionals - Canada.ca). However, the current concern lies with unimmunized staff, family members, and visitors, particularly those living in southwestern Ontario, where case numbers are highest.

Retirement home licensees are encouraged to reinforce foundational infection prevention and control (IPAC) practices. This includes hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette, and staying home when sick; encouraging staff and caregivers to get up to date with measles immunization and ensuring they have proof of their immune status (i.e., immunization records) readily accessible. As well as being vigilant for symptoms of measles, which include fever, cough, runny nose, red eyes, and a characteristic red blotchy rash.

[1] In Ontario, measles has historically been a rare disease, owing to the successful elimination of measles in Canada and high immunization coverage. Measles cases have typically been predominantly associated with travel. Due to an increase in measles activity globally in 2024, Ontario began to see more cases. Presently, Ontario is part of a multi-jurisdictional measles outbreak with measles activity occurring in Ontario and several other provinces (Public Health Ontario, 2025).

In the event of a case or an exposure, your local Public Health Unit will work with you to manage cases and contacts. Homes may also work with their local IPAC Hub for support in building IPAC capacity including implementing outbreak measures, if needed. To connect with your local IPAC Hub, please reach out to ipachubs@ontario.ca.

2. Spring Update for the 2025-26 COVID-19 Vaccine and RSV Vaccine

In spring 2025, the Ministry of Health recommends that high-risk individuals, such as retirement home residents, who have completed their primary COVID-19 vaccine series receive an additional dose. Evidence continues to suggest that infection and/or vaccine-acquired immunity wanes over time. The recommended interval for this vaccine is six months from the last dose or last infection and the earliest interval can occur at three months. Getting vaccinated and staying up to date is the best way to prevent illness.

COVID-19 vaccine doses for high-risk populations are recommended to be received between April and June[2]. Retirement home operators may coordinate with local pharmacies, public health units, or existing partners to get vaccines.

Ontario is also continuing the RSV vaccine program, now available to all retirement home residents. Residents who have not yet received their RSV vaccine can still be vaccinated this spring, as the vaccine is currently administered as a single one-time dose with no boosters required at this time. For RSV program details, operators should contact their local public health unit. Both vaccines can be co-administered.

As always, I thank you for your efforts in keeping retirement home operations running smoothly while protecting the safety and wellbeing of retirement home residents and staff. If you have any additional questions, please contact our team at RHinquiries@ontario.ca.

Sincerely,

Original signed by

Michèle Sanborn

c: Peter Kaftarian, Interim Deputy Minister, MSAA and MLTC
Marsha Pinto, Director, Retirement Homes Branch, MSAA
Dr. Kieran Moore, Chief Medical Officer of Health, OCMOH
Dr. Daniel Warshafsky, Associate Chief Medical Officer of Health, OCMOH
Jay O'Neill, Chief Executive Officer and Registrar, Retirement Homes Regulatory Authority
Cathy Hecimovich, Chief Executive Officer, Ontario Retirement Communities Association
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[2] As per the vaccines offered for the 2024/2025 respiratory illness season, Ontario will have two mRNA COVID-19 vaccines, Moderna and Pfizer, both targeting the Omicron KP.2 variant (Health Care Provider Fact Sheet: 2024/2025 COVID-19 Vaccine Program – Update, 2025).