

Toronto

Ontario quietly changes LTC rules; visitors no longer have to mask in resident rooms

Rules changed on Friday but there was no public announcement

The Canadian Press · Posted: Oct 19, 2022 4:03 PM EDT | Last Updated: October 19, 2022



According to a COVID-19 guidance document for long-term care homes on an Ontario government website, the province no longer requires visitors or caregivers to wear masks when alone with a resident in their room. (The Associated Press)

Ontario has quietly changed masking rules for long-term care homes, no longer requiring visitors or caregivers to wear them when alone with a resident in their room.

Long-term care homes are one of the only places where provincial mask mandates remain, after Ontario lifted most such requirements in June.

But the rules were changed as of Friday, though no public announcement was made. Operators were notified and the COVID-19 guidance document for long-term care homes was updated on an Ontario government website, said a spokesperson for Long-Term Care Minister Paul Calandra.

"Our government is protecting our long-term care homes by investing in Infection Prevention and Control (IPAC), hiring and retaining nurses and PSW's, and increasing daily hours of care for residents," Jake Roseman said in a statement.

"Additionally, we are now offering COVID-19 bivalent booster vaccines to long-term care residents, which will add a further layer of protection against the virus."

- [**Scarborough long-term care home battles COVID-19 outbreak with 46 residents testing positive**](#)
- [**Ontario mask mandates expire for public transit, health-care settings**](#)

Several other changes to COVID-19 rules took effect that day. Visitors no longer have to confirm in person or online that they are symptom free, instead homes are now only required to post signage listing COVID-19 symptoms.

A limit of four visitors per resident at a time for indoor visits has been removed, and long-term care homes can now set their own visitor policy. As well, residents are no longer required to be tested for COVID-19 when they return from an absence.

Staff and volunteers, meanwhile, are still required to wear medical masks for their whole shift while indoors and must not remove them while in resident areas or while interacting with residents. They are allowed to remove masks for eating and drinking while physically distanced.

Minister makes no mention of changes in visit to home

The province recommends that residents wear masks while receiving direct care and in common areas with other residents, except while eating.

For residents who live in shared rooms, the province is telling homes to designate a space for residents to entertain their visitors without masks.

Calandra visited a long-term care home on Friday to promote vaccination, but made no mention of the changes, saying measures such as masking "in all public areas" of long-term care homes would "continue" to be required.

Chief Medical Officer of Health Dr. Kieran Moore said in June he would recommend keeping the long-term care mask mandate in place until at least the summer of 2023.

Roseman said the new guidance follows Moore's advice.

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