

# Long-Term Care COVID-19 Outbreak

## Frequently Asked Questions

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### They just announced an outbreak of COVID-19 at my loved one's long-term care home. Should I be concerned?

We have been working closely with Vancouver Coastal Health Public Health Officers and Infection Prevention and Control to contain the outbreak and keep your family member safe. That is our priority. We have put outbreak control measures in place. This could mean a delay in the delivery of some services due to the stepped-up response to the outbreak.

### What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is a respiratory illness. It can spread through droplets when a person coughs or sneezes, or touching the virus with your hands then touching your face before washing your hands. Symptoms of COVID-19 may be mild or severe. These may include low grade fever, cough, malaise, runny nose, fatigue, sore throat, nausea, vomiting and/or diarrhea. More severe symptoms could include fever, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing and/or chest pain. The elderly are at higher risk of severe disease, but even in this population, most people will experience mild illness.

### If my loved one was exposed to the infected person (staff, doctor or resident) do they get tested?

All our residents and staff are being closely monitored and will be tested if they develop respiratory or gastrointestinal illness compatible with COVID-19.

### If I visited my loved one within the past few weeks, should I be tested?

We are following up with those family members who we believe may have been exposed. Family member who may have been exposed will be asked to monitor themselves for symptoms and in some cases may be asked to isolate. We would like to remind families and visitors that we are asking anyone with symptoms to self-isolate for 10 days and use the new provincial self-assessment tool to determine if you need further testing for COVID-19 (<https://covid19.thrive.health/>).

## What steps are being taken to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the facility?

We can limit the spread of illness using many of the same steps we take during seasonal influenza outbreaks:

1. **Enhanced cleaning:** We have increased cleaning frequency to high touch areas such as the side rails, tables and elevator buttons. This should reduce the risk of transmission of virus from objects
2. **Symptom Monitoring & Testing:** To prevent transmission we need to identify who might be sick. This means carefully monitoring staff and residents for symptoms and providing testing where appropriate.
3. **Isolation of Cases:** To prevent the spread of COVID-19 we take all possible steps to keep residents who have COVID-19 in their rooms while they are recovering.
4. **Physical Distancing:** During an outbreak we reduce group and social activities to decrease the risk of transmission. This may mean that enjoyable activities are put on hold.
5. **Personal Protective Equipment:** For staff and patient safety, staff will be using personal protective equipment such as masks, gloves, and gowns.
6. **Limiting to work at one location:** Staff are working at only one location. They are not moving between facilities.
7. **No Visitor Policy:** No visitors are allowed at long-term care homes, with the only exception being one family member at a time during end-of-life.

## When is the outbreak over?

When there have been no new cases for two incubation periods we can declare an outbreak over. COVID-19 has an incubation period of 14 days, so we need to see 28 days with no new cases to declare the outbreak over. We will continue to watch carefully until the risk of COVID-19 subsides in the community and there is a risk of re-introduction of the virus.

Keep in mind that any newly diagnosed cases that occur in the next few days were most likely infected before the protocols were introduced and simply had a longer incubation period. The early stages of an outbreak are an extremely stressful period because we don't know what transmission has occurred. That is why there is an initial cluster of cases and then we enter a long watchful waiting period.

## If this goes on for a long time, are we considering the psychological impact of residents staying in their rooms?

Yes, that is why we have regular outbreak meetings to see what is happening in the facility, what stage we are at, what measures need to be in place and which can be discontinued or replaced with something else. We do relax the measures as appropriate but we have to make sure we don't relax



them to the point where transmission happens again. We understand the measures cause harm as well as benefit and do our best to minimize the impact on residents.

### If we have concerns or the outbreak gets bigger here, can we still remove our relative from here?

Yes. There are no restrictions on removing a resident to your home. There are restrictions on moving them to another facility, and there is a restriction on bringing the resident back into this facility. Residents removed from the facility will not be able to re-enter until we and the health authorities are absolutely positive there is no risk in doing so, which could be an extended period.

### Who can we contact if we have questions or concerns?

If you have questions about COVID-19, please **1-888-COVID19 (1-888-268-4319)** or text **604-630-0300** from 7:30 am to 8 pm.

At the long-term care home, The Director of Care is your main contact. They may not always be able to answer right away because they may be providing care or taking care of many other tasks, as you can understand, but they will get back to you as soon as they are able.

You can also call the Family Support Line at 604-875-4953 or 1-844-824-2218. It's open from 8 am – 8 pm, 7 days per week.

### If my loved one tests positive, what happens next – do they go to hospital, are they kept in isolation?

If your loved one tests positive you will be notified and we will take steps to ensure they get the care they need. Your loved one's health-care team will work with you to make that decision based on their condition.

### I want to talk to my loved one about the outbreak to reassure them. How can I communicate if I am not allowed into the facility?

Please call the facility to see how we can set up communication with your loved one.. Please be patient if you have trouble getting through and rest assured we will try to connect you as soon as possible.



If a staff member is infected, how will my loved one's care be affected? Will their care be compromised now that the staff member is not there?

We are working hard to source out extra staff to make up for any gaps due to staff isolation. We are deeply grateful for the patience, kindness and understanding of our residents and families as we work hard to mitigate this outbreak.

I have heard there are mask and other protective equipment shortages. Is this shortage putting this site and my loved one at increased risk of infection?

We are actively sourcing equipment if it should be required.

How are you looking after my loved one's emotional health with this outbreak?

We understand isolation is a significant issue among the elderly and particularly during this pandemic period when many new policies are in place for everyone's protection. We are working on creative ways to get you in touch with your loved one that will not compromise their safety, or the safety of other residents or staff. Please contact the site for more details on what you can do to reach your loved one.