

Ministry of Health

COVID-19 Guidance: Long-Term Care Homes and Retirement Homes for Public Health Units

Version 6 – June 11, 2022

Highlight of Changes:

- Removal of references to Directive #3 throughout
- Updated to refer LTCHs and RHs to MLTC Minister's Directive and Guidance, where applicable
- Removal of redundant requirements captured within MLTC Directives and Guidance (e.g., screening, masking, physical distancing)
- Addition of Outbreak Preparedness Planning as part of prevention recommendations
- Updated testing guidance to clarify that molecular testing is recommended for individuals living or working in LTCHs and RHs
- Updates to contact management to remove recommendations based on vaccination status

This guidance document provides information for local public health units (PHU) to support their COVID-19 response, including case, contact and outbreak management, in long-term care homes (LTCHs) and retirement homes (RHs). It is not intended to take the place of medical advice, diagnosis or treatment, or legal advice.

- **Note:** In addition to COVID-19, common viral pathogens that are traditionally responsible for respiratory infection outbreaks in LTCHs and RHs may also be circulating in Ontario. These viruses include, but are not limited to, entero/rhinovirus, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), and influenza virus. Where appropriate, this version of the guidance has incorporated strategies to prevent and manage these non-COVID-19 viral pathogens. However, for more detailed information on this topic, please refer to the MOH's [Control of Respiratory Infection Outbreaks in Long-Term Care Homes](#), which is the foundational document for respiratory outbreak-related guidance in LTCHs and RHs.

In accordance with the Minister's Directive: COVID-19 response measures for long-term care homes issued under the *Fixing Long-Term Care Act, 2021*, effective April 27, 2022 ("**the Minister's Directive**"), licensees must ensure that certain aspects of this guidance document are followed in their long-term care home. Please see the Minister's Directive and the COVID-19 guidance document for long-term care homes in Ontario for more information about what is required.

In accordance with clause 27(5) (O.a) of O. Reg. 166/11 under the *Retirement Homes Act, 2010* ("RHA"), the licensee of a retirement home shall ensure that any guidance, advice, or recommendations given to the retirement homes by the Chief Medical Officer of Health are followed in the retirement home. Per the Chief Medical Officer of Health ("CMOH") of Ontario memorandum dated June 11, 2022, the CMOH recommends that retirement homes implement the policies, procedures, and preventative measures in this guidance document.

Specific guidance and operationalization of the policies, procedures and preventative measures in this guidance document may vary between LTCHs and RHs due to the inherent differences between these two sectors. In co-located LTCHs and RHs that are not operationally independent, the policies for the LTCH and RH should align where possible and follow the more restrictive requirements.

In the event of any conflict between this guidance document and any applicable orders, or directives issued by the Minister of Health, Minister of Long-Term Care, or the Chief Medical Officer of Health (CMOH), the order or directive prevails.

The updates in this guidance document are based on the scientific evidence and public health expertise available so far across Canada and abroad and are subject to change as the knowledge of COVID-19 vaccines and immunity evolve over time.

Other resources:

- Please consult the Ministry of Health's (MOH) [COVID-19 website](#) regularly for updates to this document, case definition, FAQs, and other COVID-19 related information.
- Public Health Ontario (PHO) has developed a number of [LTCH](#) and [health care](#) sector-specific resources on COVID-19, including:
 - [Infection Prevention and Control for Long-Term Care Homes: Summary of Key Principles and Best Practices.](#)
 - [COVID-19: Infection Prevention and Control Checklist for Long-Term Care and Retirement Homes.](#)

- [Prevention and Management of COVID-19 in Long-Term Care Homes and Retirement Homes.](#)
- [Technical Brief: Interim Infection and Control Measures Based on COVID-19 Transmission Risks in Health Care Settings](#)

Terms Used in this Document:

- Please refer to the Ministry of Health's [Staying Up to Date with COVID-19 Vaccines: Recommended Doses](#) document for the definition of **“up to date”** for COVID-19 vaccines where applicable in this document.
- The term **“home”** is used to include a long-term care home (LTCH) and retirement home (RH).
- For this document, the term **“staff”** is used to include anyone conducting work activities in LTCHs or RHs, regardless of their employer. This includes, but is not limited to:
 - Staff employed by the home (e.g., health care workers, support staff),
 - Health care workers seeing a single resident for a single episode,
 - Temporary and/or agency staff,
 - Students on placement (e.g., nursing students), and
 - Volunteers.
- The term **“self-isolation”** has been commonly used in the public discourse during the pandemic and, for ease of understanding, is used in this document to refer to both **quarantine** (separating individuals who have been exposed from others) and **isolation** (separating individuals who are infected from others who are not sick).
- **Additional Precautions** refer to those precautions that are necessary in addition to Routine Practices for certain pathogens or clinical presentations and are based on the method of transmission. Additional Precautions include Contact Precautions, Droplet Precautions and Airborne Precautions. In comparison, Routine Practices are a system of Infection Prevention and Control (IPAC)

practices that is to be used with all clients/patients/residents during all care to prevent and control transmission of microorganisms in all health care settings.

* Definition adapted from: Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion, Provincial Infectious Diseases Advisory Committee. [Routine Practices and Additional Precautions in All Health Care Settings](#). 3rd edition. Toronto, ON: Queen's Printer for Ontario; November 2012.

COVID-19 Guidance: Long-Term Care Homes and Retirement Homes for Public Health Units 1

Highlight of Changes: 1

Other resources: 2

Terms Used in this Document:..... 3

Roles and Responsibilities.....7

 Role of the Public Health Unit (PHU) 7

 Role of the Ministry of Health (MOH) 8

 Role of MLTC and MSAA/RHRA..... 8

 Role of Ministry of Government and Consumer Services (MGCS) 9

 Role of Public Health Ontario (PHO)..... 9

 Role of the long-term care home (LTCH) and the retirement home (RH)..... 9

 Role of Ontario Health..... 11

 Role of the IPAC Hubs..... 11

 Role of MLTSD..... 12

 Role of external partners 12

Prevention of Disease Transmission 13

 Outbreak Preparedness Plan..... 13

 IPAC Programs and Audits 14

 Vaccination..... 15

 Active Screening and Passive Screening..... 15

 Daily Symptom Assessment of Residents..... 16

 Asymptomatic Screen Testing..... 16

 Hand Hygiene..... 17

 Physical Distancing 17

 Masking..... 18

 Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)..... 18

 Environmental Cleaning and Disinfection..... 19

 Ventilation and Filtration 20

COVID-19 Specific Policies and Procedures..... 21

 Admissions and Transfers.....21

 Absences25

 Visitors.....25

Case and Contact Management..... 25

 Management of Symptomatic Individuals25

 Case Management27

 Contact Management28

Outbreak Management..... 32

 Declaring an Outbreak.....33

 Suspect Outbreak Management.....34

 Confirmed Outbreak Management.....35

 Cohorting in an Outbreak Setting.....36

 Diagnostic Testing for Outbreak Management36

 Declaring the Outbreak Over.....37

Occupational Health & Safety 38

 Staff Exposure/Staff Illness.....38

 Reporting staff illness.....38

Appendix A: Summary for Active Screening Practices for Homes..... 40

Appendix B: Clinical Presentation for Respiratory Tract Infections42

Appendix C: PPE Escalations to the Region and Ministry..... 44

**Appendix D: Algorithm for Testing and Management of Acute Respiratory
Illness in LTCHs and RHs..... 45**

Appendix E: Algorithm for Admissions and Transfers for LTCHs and RHs46

Appendix F: Algorithm for Managing Contacts in LTCHs and RHs..... 47

Roles and Responsibilities

Role of the Public Health Unit (PHU)

Prevention and Preparedness

- Advise homes on COVID-19 prevention (including hierarchy of controls) and preparedness for managing COVID-19 cases, contacts and outbreaks, in conjunction with advice provided through the Ministry of Health (MOH), the MLTC, and the Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility (MSAA).

Case and Contact Management/Outbreak Management

- Receive and investigate reports of suspected or confirmed cases and contacts of COVID-19. See the [Public Health Management of Cases and Contacts of COVID-19 in Ontario](#) for specialized guidance on PHU case and contact management.
- Enter cases, contacts, and outbreaks in the provincial surveillance system, in accordance with data entry guidance provided by PHO.
- Determine if an outbreak exists and declare an outbreak. Provide guidance and recommendations to the home on outbreak control measures in conjunction with advice provided by MOH, as well as MLTC and/or MSAA as relevant.
- Make recommendations on who to test, facilitate a coordinated approach to testing, in collaboration with Ontario Health, including provision of an investigation or outbreak number.
- Host and coordinate outbreak meetings with the home, MLTC/ Retirement Homes Regulatory Authority (RHRA), Ontario Health, Infection Prevention and Control (IPAC) Hubs, etc.
- Issue orders by the medical officer of health or their designate under the *Health Protection and Promotion Act* (HPPA), if necessary.
- Declare the outbreak over.

Coordination and Communication

- In the event that a case or contact resides in a PHU that is different than that of the home, discussions between the respective PHUs should take place to coordinate contact follow-up and delineate roles and responsibilities.
 - The PHU of the home is typically the lead PHU for home follow-up.
 - Request support from the Ministry of Health if coordination between multiple PHUs is required for outbreak management.

- Notify the MOH (IDPP@ontario.ca) of:
 - Potential for significant media coverage or if media releases are planned by the PHU and/or LTCH/RH.
 - Any orders issued by the PHU's medical officer of health or their designate to the LTCH/RH and share a copy.
- Engage and/or communicate with relevant partners, stakeholders, and ministries, as necessary.

Role of the Ministry of Health (MOH)

- Provide legislative and policy oversight to PHUs and their Boards of Health.
- Issue guidance to PHUs on the management of COVID-19 cases, contacts, and outbreaks, and provide clear expectations of PHUs' roles and responsibilities.
- Provide ongoing support to PHUs with partner agencies, ministries, health care professionals, and the public, as necessary.
- Support PHUs during investigations with respect to coordination, policy interpretation, communications, etc. as requested.
- Support and coordinate teleconferences, if needed.
- Receive notifications:
 - If the PHU believes there is potential for significant media coverage.
 - If orders are issued by the local medical officer of health or their designate to the home.

Role of MLTC and MSAA/RHRA

- Provide legislative and policy oversight to homes.
- Collaborate with the homes to monitor testing demands and access (MSAA only).
- Communicate expectations and provincial-level guidance on COVID-19 related policies, measures, and practices to homes.
- Provide ongoing support and communications to homes with partner agencies, ministries, and the public, as necessary.
- Support the procurement of supplies of personal protective equipment (PPE).

Role of Ministry of Government and Consumer Services (MGCS)

- For LTCHs: Collaborate with MLTC and homes to monitor testing demands and support access.
- For LTCHs: Support the procurement of supplies of personal protective equipment (PPE).

Role of Public Health Ontario (PHO)

- Provide scientific and technical advice to PHUs to support case and contact management, outbreak investigations, and data entry.
- Develop evidence-informed resources, programs, and approaches to inform the supports provided by IPAC Hubs.
- Provide advice and support to IPAC Hubs to expand pre-existing IPAC networks.
- Advise on and support laboratory testing as needed.
- Work with MOH and other government and health system partners on a coordinated approach to strengthening IPAC programs and individual capacity.
- Provide scientific and technical advice to MOH and PHUs, including multi-jurisdictional teleconferences.

Role of the long-term care home (LTCH) and the retirement home (RH)

- All homes are required to report that a person is or may be infected with an agent of a communicable disease to their local PHU, as per subsection 27(2) of the HPPA.
 - COVID-19 is a designated disease of public health significance and a communicable disease ([O. Reg. 135/18](#)). As such, all suspected and confirmed cases of COVID-19 are reportable to the local PHU under the [HPPA](#).
 - LTCHs are required to immediately report any COVID-19 case or outbreak (suspected or confirmed) to the MLTC using the Critical Incident System during regular working hours or calling the after-hours line at 1-888-999-6973 after hours and on weekends.
 - LTCHs must also follow the critical incident reporting requirements in section 115 of O. Reg. 246/22 under the [Fixing Long-Term Care Act, 2021](#) (FLTCA)

- RHs are required to report any infectious disease outbreak to the local PHU and must report it to the Retirement Homes Regulatory Authority on the same day.
- All homes, as employers under the [Occupational Health and Safety Act, 1990](#) (OHSA) and its regulations, have a duty to take every precaution reasonable in the circumstances for the protection of a worker. This includes protecting workers from the hazards of infectious diseases.
- Under OHSA, an employer must provide written notice to the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development (MLTSD) within four days of being advised that a worker has an [occupational illness](#) and under the [Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997](#) (WSIA), must report to Workplace Safety Insurance Board (WSIB) and to relevant trade union, if any, within 72 hours of receiving notification of said illness.
- Implement measures found in guidance or as directed by the MOH, MLTSD, and their local PHU, as well as the Chief Medical Officer of Health, MLTC (including Directives issued by the Minister of Long-Term Care) and/or MSAA/RHRA as applicable.
- Coordinate with the local PHU and other stakeholders as appropriate, as part of the investigation of cases, contacts, and outbreaks.
- Maintain accurate records of staff attendance, all visitors, and resident information.
 - Facilitate access for PHUs to staff lists for staff not directly employed by the home (e.g., third party/temporary agency workers).
 - Keep a log of all visitors (i.e., essential visitors including caregivers, general visitors) who enter the home for a minimum of 30 days which includes, at minimum, the name and contact information of the visitor; the time and date of the visit; and the name of the resident visited.
 - Provide PHU with the name(s) and contact information of a designated point of contact for use during and/or after business hours, to ensure timely investigation and follow up cases, contacts and outbreaks.
 - In collaboration with the PHU, communicate proactively with the home's staff, visitors, residents, and the resident families about COVID-19 prevention measures and about how ill individuals, cases, contacts and outbreaks will be handled.

- Provide training to home staff, including temporary/agency staff and staff/volunteers from external partners, with respect to outbreak prevention and control measures, including IPAC measures and the use of PPE.
- Follow the directions of the local PHU if any staff or residents have COVID-19, are exposed to someone with COVID-19, or if there is a suspect or confirmed outbreak in the home.
- Encourage/support COVID-19 vaccination by providing education to workers.

Role of Ontario Health

- Coordinate local planning among health system partners for testing to ensure the availability of testing resources.
- Deploy testing resources and modalities to meet the testing needs identified by the PHU and the home.
- Work with testing centres to optimize sample collection and distribution to reduce turnaround times.

Role of the IPAC Hubs

- Facilitate access to IPAC training and practice needs for LTCHs and RHs within their catchment area.
- Strengthen current partnerships with homes in their catchment and broker new ones.
- Support a network of IPAC service providers and experts and work to align local resources to IPAC needs within LTCHs and RHs for both prevention and response.
- Bring forward and escalate issues of concern that are outside of the scope of IPAC through established mechanisms with ministry partners.
- Collaborate with PHO and other government and health system partners to strengthen IPAC programs reflecting field observations.
- Help to support homes with the implementation of outbreak control measures provided by the PHU or Outbreak Management Team.

Role of MLTSD

- Receive notice of an occupational illness from employers under subsection 52(2) of the OHS Act. An occupational illness includes any condition that results from exposure in a workplace to a physical, chemical or biological agent to the extent that normal physiological mechanisms are affected, and the health of the worker is impaired; and includes an illness caused by an infection from an exposure at the workplace.
- Investigate occupational illness notifications to determine if the employer is in compliance with the OHS Act and its regulations and that appropriate measures have been taken to prevent further illnesses.
- Inspect workplaces to monitor compliance with the OHS Act and its regulations.
- Investigate unsafe work practices, critical injuries, fatalities, work refusals and occupational illness, all as related to worker health and safety. This includes investigation of reports of COVID-19 by employers to MLTSD.
- Issue orders under the OHS Act and its regulations.
- The MLTSD Health and Safety Contact Centre (1-877-202-0008) is available for anyone to report health and safety concerns or complaints.
- While this document focuses in part on the role of the MLTSD's health and safety program, the ministry also administers the [Employment Standards Act, 2000](#). If workplace parties request information regarding employment standards, they can be referred to the Employment Standards Information Centre: 1-800-531-5551.

Role of external partners

- This includes external organizations who are engaged or brought on to assist with a home's outbreak response including, but not limited to, the Canadian Red Cross.
- Inform the PHU and the home of their engagement to assist with the home's outbreak response.
- Follow the direction of the PHU and assist in the outbreak response as advised by the PHU.
- Follow the direction of the IPAC hubs and assist IPAC hubs as part of the overall outbreak response (e.g., auditing, training, reinforcing of IPAC practices).

Prevention of Disease Transmission

Homes can help prevent and limit the spread of COVID-19 and other common respiratory viruses by ensuring that general IPAC practices (e.g., [hand hygiene](#) and [respiratory etiquette](#)) are in place while also respecting the physical, mental, emotional, and psychosocial well-being of residents. Factors such as the physical/infrastructure characteristics of the home, staffing availability, and the availability of and training on PPE should all be considered when developing home-specific policies.

The measures outlined below should be carried out at all times regardless of the COVID-19 situation in the home and may also help to protect against other common respiratory virus infections and outbreaks.

Outbreak Preparedness Plan

- For LTCHs, refer to section 1.1 of the Minister's Directive for COVID-19 Outbreak Preparedness Plan Requirements.
- It is recommended that RHs, in consultation with their joint health and safety committees or health and safety representatives, if any, ensure that measures are taken to prepare for and respond to a COVID-19 outbreak, including developing and implementing a COVID-19 Outbreak Preparedness Plan. It is recommended that this plan include:
 - Identifying members of the Outbreak Management Team;
 - Identifying their local IPAC Hub and their contact information;
 - Enforcing an IPAC program, in accordance with the RHA and [O. Reg. 166/11](#), both for non-outbreak and outbreak situations, in collaboration with IPAC Hubs, public health units, local hospitals, Home and Community Care Support Services, and/or regional Ontario Health;
 - Ensuring non-expired testing kits are available and stored appropriately, and plans are in place for taking specimens;
 - Ensuring sufficient PPE is available and that all staff and volunteers are trained on IPAC protocols, including how to perform a personal risk assessment and the appropriate use of PPE;
 - Developing policies to manage staff who may have been exposed to COVID-19;

- Developing and implement and communication plan to keeping staff, residents, and families informed about the status of COVID-19 in the homes, including frequent and ongoing communication during outbreaks.

IPAC Programs and Audits

- Pursuant to section 23 of the [Fixing Long-Term Care Act, 2021](#) (FLTCA), and subsection 60(4) of the [Retirement Homes Act, 2010](#) (RHA), every LTCH and RH in Ontario is legally required to have an IPAC program as part of their operations.
- Per the legislation, each LTCH must have individual(s) who are responsible for an IPAC program in the home. It is recommended that each RH have individual(s) who are responsible for an IPAC program in the home.
 - For LTCHs, also refer to section 23 of that Act and section 229 of O. Reg. 246/22, as well as the IPAC Standard for Long-Term Care Homes.
- [IPAC self-audits](#) are an integral component of a home's IPAC program that enable homes to:
 - Meet their minimum requirements under applicable legislation, regulations or any other applicable legal requirements ;
 - Increase the home's awareness and consistency in application of best practices in IPAC measures;
 - Assess their staff's knowledge and ability to implement IPAC measures; and,
 - Identify any gaps for further improvement through a continuous quality improvement process.
- The individual(s) responsible for the home's IPAC program is also responsible for conducting IPAC self-audits at regular intervals in a supportive learning environment in order to normalize and promote IPAC best practices into the home's day-to-day operations and culture.
- For LTCHs, refer to section 1.1 of the Minister's Directive for IPAC audit requirements. It is recommended that RHs conduct self-audits every two weeks when the home is not in outbreak and every week during an outbreak, and include in their audit the [COVID-19: Self-Assessment Audit Tool for Long-Term Care Homes and Retirement Homes](#) . It is also recommended that retirement homes keep the IPAC audit results for at least 30 days and share with inspectors from the local public health unit, MLTSD and the RHRA upon request.

- PHUs should ensure that homes are regularly conducting audits and ensuring that they are connected with appropriate supports to set homes up for success, including but not limited to IPAC Hubs and other health system partners.

Vaccination

- PHUs are asked to continue to support COVID-19 vaccination in the LTCH/RH sectors in collaboration with the home and relevant health system partners. Where possible, this includes assisting homes with on-site vaccination and supporting hospitals to vaccinate individuals if they are being admitted to a LTCH/RH from hospital.
- COVID-19 vaccination is one of the most effective ways to help prevent severe illness and death due to COVID-19. PHUs and homes are asked to continue to encourage residents, staff, caregivers and visitors to remain [up-to-date](#) with their COVID-19 vaccinations.
 - New admissions to LTCHs and RHs who are not [up-to-date](#) with their COVID-19 vaccinations should be offered a complete series of a COVID-19 vaccination, or their remaining eligible doses, as soon as possible.
 - For more information on the COVID-19 vaccine and resources available refer to Ontario's [COVID-19 Communication Resources](#) page.
- Residents may also be eligible for the influenza, pneumococcal, tetanus, zoster and diphtheria vaccines in accordance with Ontario's [publicly funded immunization schedule](#).

Active Screening and Passive Screening

For LTCHs, refer to section 9 of the Minister's Directive, which states that LTCHs are required to ensure that the COVID-19 screening requirements as set out in the [COVID-19 Guidance Document for Long-Term Care Homes in Ontario](#), or as amended ("**MLTC COVID-19 Guidance**"), are followed .

It is recommended that RHs ensure that the COVID-19 screening requirements as set out in the MLTC COVID-19 Guidance are followed.

Daily Symptom Assessment of Residents

- For LTCHs, refer to section 9 of the Minister's Directive regarding COVID-19 screening for requirements pertaining to the daily symptom assessment of residents. Per section 9 of the Minister's Directive, LTCHs are required to ensure the MLTC COVID-19 guidance is followed.
- It is recommended that RHs ensure the COVID-19 screening requirements in the MLTC COVID-19 guidance, which includes requirements for the daily symptom assessment of residents, are followed.
- See [Appendix B](#) for a list of acute respiratory symptoms for different respiratory outbreak-associated viruses including COVID-19.

Asymptomatic Screen Testing

- This refers to the practice of routinely testing asymptomatic individuals who are neither experiencing COVID-19 symptoms nor have been exposed to a known COVID-19 case. The rationale for this type of testing is to create an additional layer of protection through the early identification and management of asymptomatic cases. This does not replace, and should not supersede, routine IPAC practices nor is it equivalent to diagnostic testing (see [Management of Symptomatic Individuals](#), below).
- For LTCHs, refer to section 8 of the Minister's Directive, which states that LTCHs are required to ensure that the asymptomatic screening requirements in the MLTC COVID-19 Guidance are followed.
- It is recommended that RHs ensure that the asymptomatic screening requirements in the MLTC COVID-19 Guidance are followed. PHUs should advise homes of the benefits and the limitations associated with the COVID-19 testing platforms available. For example, individuals who have previously been diagnosed with and cleared of COVID-19 infection recently may continue to test positive for COVID-19 for several weeks even though they are no longer infectious, particularly on PCR testing.
- An individual with confirmed COVID-19 (based on a molecular test or rapid antigen test) may be excluded from asymptomatic screen testing for 90 days from their COVID-19 infection (based on the date of their symptom onset or specimen collection, whichever is earlier). If an individual was ill but there is no test confirmation of a COVID-19 infection, they should resume asymptomatic testing immediately.

- Residents with symptoms compatible with an acute respiratory infection including COVID-19 (see [Appendix B](#)) or those who have not passed active screening on return to the home following an absence should be placed in self-isolation on additional precautions and tested. See [Management of Symptomatic Individuals](#), below.

Hand Hygiene

- Access to handwashing stations and/or [alcohol-based hand rub \(ABHR\) should be available at multiple, prominent locations in the home](#), including entrances, common areas, and point-of-care (e.g., resident rooms) to promote frequent hand hygiene.
- All staff, visitors, and residents should be reminded through training and signage to:
 - Clean hands by washing with liquid soap and water or using ABHR (70%-90% alcohol).
 - Wash hands with soap and water if hands are visibly dirty.
 - If gloves are being used, perform hand hygiene prior to putting on gloves.
 - After use, gloves should be placed in the garbage. After removing them, clean hands again.
- Homes should ensure adequate supplies are maintained.

Physical Distancing

- PHUs should refer to [Public Health Ontario's Technical Brief on Interim Infection Prevention and Control Measures based on COVID-19 Transmission Risks in Health Care Settings](#) and advise the homes on the use of physical distancing within a home depending on the risk of transmission in their community.
- For LTCHs, refer to section 1.3 of the Minister's Directive, which states LTCHs are required to ensure that the physical distancing requirements as set out in the MLTC COVID-19 guidance are followed.
- It is recommended that RHs ensure that the [physical distancing](#) requirements as set out in the MLTC COVID-19 guidance are followed.

Masking

For LTCHs, refer to section 1.2 of the Minister's Directive, which states that LTCHs are required to ensure that the masking requirements as set out in the MLTC COVID-19 Guidance are followed.

It is recommended that RHs ensure that the masking requirements as set out in the MLTC COVID-19 Guidance are followed.

- For guidance on universal mask use, refer to Public Health Ontario (PHO)'s [COVID-19: Universal Mask Use in Health Care](#) and [COVID-19: Universal Mask Use in Health Care Settings and Retirement Homes](#) documents.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Per section 2 of the Minister's Directive, licensees of LTCHs are required to ensure that the personal protective requirements as set out in this guidance document are followed.

It is recommended that RHs ensure the personal protective requirements as set out in this guidance document are followed.

- PPE is intended to protect the wearer to minimize their risk of exposure to COVID-19 and other potential hazards.
- The effectiveness of PPE depends on the worker using it correctly and consistently. The employer must train workers on how to perform a personal risk assessment for the selection of PPE and the care, use, maintenance, and limitations of any PPE that they use. If manipulated or altered, PPE may not function to manufacturer's specification.
- In addition to source control, medical masks also serve as PPE for staff and visitors. Medical masks protect the person who is wearing the mask from becoming exposed to other people's potentially infectious respiratory droplets.
 - ASTM certified medical masks of any level are appropriate for this purpose.
 - Non-medical masks (e.g., cloth masks) cannot be used as PPE.
- Additional PPE may be required in specific situations. Choosing PPE, including the use of N95 respirators, should be guided by the nature, type, and duration of the intended interaction and by a point-of-care risk assessment.
 - See [COVID-19 Guidance: Personal Protective Equipment \(PPE\) for Health Care Workers and Health Care Entities](#) and [PHO's Interim IPAC](#)

[Recommendations for Use of Personal Protective Equipment for Care of Individuals with Suspect or Confirmed COVID-19](#) for more information on PPE use.

- From an occupational health and safety perspective, regardless of their COVID-19 vaccination status, appropriate eye protection (e.g., goggles or face shield) is required for all staff and essential visitors when providing care to residents with suspect/confirmed COVID-19 and in the provision of direct care within 2 metres of residents in an outbreak area. In all other circumstances, the use of eye protection is based on the point-of-care risk assessment when within 2 metres of a resident(s).
- Eye protection is used to protect the wearer (specifically, their eyes) from potentially infectious respiratory droplets and aerosols. Eye protection for PPE purposes includes face shields, some safety glasses, and goggles. When choosing eye protection, ensure that it is close fitting around the head and/or with integrated side shields to provide a barrier from the front, the sides, and the top. The use of eye protection is in addition to and does not replace the need for a medical mask or equal or greater protection (e.g., fit-tested N95 respirators).
 - Where eye protection is used, homes should establish appropriate procedures for [cleaning and disinfecting of re-useable eye protection](#).
- [Appendix C](#) contains information on how to initiate PPE inquiries to the Ministry.
- Homes must also provide all health care workers, other staff, and any visitors who are required to wear PPE with information and training on the care, safe use, maintenance, and limitations of that PPE, including training on proper donning and doffing.

Environmental Cleaning and Disinfection

- For LTCHs, refer to section 1.4 of the Minister's Directive for environmental cleaning requirements.
- It is recommended that RHs ensure that regular environmental cleaning of their facilities is maintained and enhanced environmental cleaning and disinfection for frequently touched surfaces is performed. For RHs, it is also recommended that:
 - RHs be cleaned regularly (e.g., at least once a day) and that cleaning be performed using a health care grade cleaner/disinfectant with a drug identification number (DIN).
 - All common areas (including bathrooms) and high-touch surfaces (i.e., that are frequently touched and used) be cleaned and disinfected at least once

a day and when visibly dirty. These include door handles, light switches, elevator buttons, handrails, trolleys, and other common equipment in the home.

- All shared equipment (e.g., shower chairs, vital machines, lifts) are to be cleaned and disinfected between each resident/use.
- Contact surfaces (i.e., areas within 2 metres) of the person who has screened positive should be disinfected as soon as possible.
- For more information on environmental cleaning, refer to:
 - [Key Elements of Environmental Cleaning in Healthcare Settings](#) (Fact Sheet);
 - [Best Practices for Environmental Cleaning for Prevention and Control of Infections in All Health Care Settings](#); and,
 - [PIDAC Routine Practices and Additional Precautions in All Health Care Settings](#).

Ventilation and Filtration

- In general, ventilation with fresh air and filtration can improve indoor air quality and provide layers of protection as part of a comprehensive COVID-19 strategy.
- To reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission, outdoor activities are encouraged over indoor activities where appropriate and possible.
- Indoor spaces should be as well ventilated as much as possible, through a combination of strategies: natural ventilation (e.g., by regular opening of windows and doors), local exhaust fans, (e.g., bathroom exhaust fan), or centrally by a heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) system.
- Directional currents can move air from one occupant's breathing space to another. Portable units should be placed in a manner that avoids person-to-person air currents. Expert consultation may be needed to assess and identify priority areas for improvement and improve ventilation and filtration to the extent possible given HVAC system characteristics.
 - Ensure that HVAC systems are functioning properly through regular inspection and maintenance (e.g., filter changes).
 - For more information, see PHO's [Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning \(HVAC\) Systems in Buildings and COVID-19](#).

- The use of [portable air cleaners](#) can help filter out aerosols, especially where ventilation is inadequate or mechanical ventilation does not exist.
- Ventilation and filtration are important for overall indoor air quality as they help to dilute or reduce potentially infectious respiratory droplets and aerosols in a given space over time while they operate. They do not prevent transmission in close contact situations and as with other measures need to be implemented as part of a comprehensive and layered strategy against COVID-19.

COVID-19 Specific Policies and Procedures

Homes are required to have policies and procedures in place to ensure the implementation of strong IPAC controls and precautions that are balanced against residents' individual and collective self-determination, desires, and their need for social interaction, emotional, and physical support. In addition, homes need to have policies and procedures that are flexible and account for various scenarios, from where there is minimal risk of COVID-19 in the home and in the community to where there is a higher risk of COVID-19 in the home and the strictest measures are required to prevent and mitigate uncontrolled spread in the home. PHUs continue to have the discretion to modify or discontinue any activity in the home as part of their outbreak investigation and management.

For detailed requirements, please refer to the section on IPAC Programs and Audits in the sections above.

Admissions and Transfers

Per section 5.1 of the Minister's Directive, LTCHs shall ensure that the detailed requirements and information related to admission and transfer into the home, including requirements for testing and isolation, are followed as set out in this guidance document.

It is recommended that RHs follow the admission and transfer requirements, including requirements for testing and isolation, as set out in this guidance document.

- Admissions and transfers are permitted when the home is not in an outbreak and the resident is not on Additional Precautions due to symptoms, exposure, or diagnosis of COVID-19 to minimize the risk of infection transmission.
 - Admissions and transfers to a home in an outbreak and/or involving a resident who is on Additional Precautions may be considered in partnership with the local PHU and with respect to patient/resident safety, quality of care, and system capacity. There should be concurrence

between the home, local PHU, and hospital. Refer to table 1 and [Appendix E](#) for more information.

- Admissions and transfers to an outbreak floor/unit should be avoided in the following circumstances, recognizing this may not always be possible:
 - Newly declared outbreak where there is an ongoing investigation;
 - Outbreaks where new cases are occurring beyond those known contacts who have already been isolating (i.e., uncontrolled/uncontained[†]); OR,
 - Admissions or transfer to floors/units where many residents are unable to follow public health measures due to health or other reasons.
- If necessary, residents that were NOT exposed to COVID-19 at their home in outbreak prior to admission or transfer to the acute care facility or during their stay may be admitted or transferred to a floor/unit with an uncontrolled/uncontained outbreak, provided the following conditions are met:
 - Resident is [up-to-date](#) on their COVID-19 vaccinations;
 - Resident (or substitute decision-maker) is made aware of the risks of the admission or transfer and consents to the admission or transfer. It is important to note the resident should not face any unintended consequences in terms of home placement should the resident (or substitute decision-maker) choose not to consent;
 - Resident is admitted or transferred to a private room;
 - Resident is asymptomatic on discharge from the acute care facility; AND,
 - The resident can remain isolated until the outbreak is contained, and the PHU has determined that the resident's Isolation Precautions may be safely discontinued.
- Any resident being admitted or transferred, regardless of their COVID-19 vaccination status, who is identified as having symptoms, exposure, and/or diagnosis of COVID-19 must be self-isolated and placed on Additional Precautions at the home and managed as per the [Management of Cases and Contacts of COVID-19 in Ontario](#) in addition to the requirements below.

[†] Uncontrolled/uncontained outbreaks are defined as outbreaks where new cases are occurring beyond those known contacts who have already been isolating.

- All residents who are being admitted or transferred to a home must undergo screening regardless of their COVID-19 vaccination status.
- **If the resident is coming from another LTCH, RH, or a health care facility that is NOT experiencing a COVID-19 outbreak at the time of transfer:** A COVID-19 molecular test is required on day 5. The resident is not required to isolate if they pass screening and are asymptomatic. Refer to Table 1 below and [Appendix E](#).
 - If the test is positive, see [Case Management](#) below.
 - If the resident is being transferred from a health care facility that is in a COVID-19 outbreak, treat as a contact (see [Contact Management](#), below).
- **If the resident is coming from the community:** A COVID-19 molecular test is required prior to admission (i.e., within 24 hours of admission) or on arrival (i.e., day 0), and a second COVID-19 molecular test is required on or after day 5. The resident is required to isolate until a negative day 0 result is obtained. Refer to Table 1 below and Appendix E.
- **If it is necessary for residents to be admitted or transferred to a home with a COVID-19 outbreak** in order to provide optimal care for residents or due to capacity issues, etc., Refer to Table 1 below and Appendix E for setting specific requirements for admissions and transfers.
 - Residents with conditions that present an increased risk to themselves or others if they become infected should not be admitted to the outbreak unit/floor without appropriate public health measures to prevent transmission. For example, residents:
 - Who are severely immunocompromised;
 - With a history of wandering/confused behaviour;
 - Who are not up-to date on their COVID-19 vaccines.
 - With conditions requiring extensive care provisions unless there is adequate staffing to manage resident care needs; OR,
 - With other concerns which may result in decreased compliance with public health measures.
 - For admissions or transfers from an acute care facility, the discharging physician should agree to the admission or transfer to a home in outbreak.

Table 1: Testing and Self-Isolation Requirements for Admissions and Transfers

| Setting | Requirements | |
|--|---|---|
| <p>From a LTCH, RH, or a health care facility NOT in an outbreak</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active screen on arrival • Molecular test on day 5. • Isolation not required unless symptomatic or positive test results. • In the event that testing is positive: treat as a case. | |
| <p>From a health care facility in an outbreak</p> <p>Admission or transfer should be considered in partnership with the local PHU, and there is concurrence between the home, the local PHU, and the health care facility</p> | <p>Consultation with PHU is not required if the resident has:</p> <p>Recovered from COVID-19 in the last 90 days*</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Isolation not required; monitor for symptoms <p>OR</p> <p>Been exposed to COVID-19 in their home prior to admission to the hospital and are still within their isolation period following exposure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Treat resident as a high-risk contact <p>OR</p> <p>NOT been exposed to COVID-19 in their home prior to hospital admission or during their hospital stay.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Admitted to home not in outbreak: Molecular test prior to admission (i.e., within 24 hours of admission) or on arrival (i.e., day 0) and on day 5 • If positive: manage as a case | <p>Consultation with PHU required if returning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COVID-19 positive resident to home NOT in outbreak • Symptomatic resident to home NOT in outbreak (without negative PCR result) • A well or COVID-19 negative resident from hospital to a home with an active (uncontrolled/uncontained) outbreak • Resident is unable to access a private room • Resident is not up-to-date on their COVID-19 vaccinations. <p>PHU to advise on isolation and testing</p> |

| Setting | Requirements |
|---------------------------|---|
| From the community | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Screen and isolate on arrival until negative molecular test taken within 24 hours of admission or on arrival (day 0) is obtained. Repeat molecular testing on or after day 5. |

Absences

For LTCHs, refer to section 6 of the Minister's Directive, which states LTCHs are required to ensure that the resident absence requirements as set out in the MLTC COVID-19 Guidance Document are followed.

It is recommended that RHs ensure the resident absence requirements as set out in the MLTC COVID-19 Guidance Document are followed.

Visitors

For LTCHs, refer to section 7 of the Minister's Directive, which states LTCHs are required to ensure that the visitor requirements as set out in the MLTC COVID-19 Guidance are followed.

It is recommended that RHs ensure that the visitor requirements as set out in the MLTC COVID-19 Guidance are followed.

Case and Contact Management

For LTCHs, refer to section 4 of the Minister's Directive, which states that LTCHs are required to ensure that the requirements for case and outbreak management as set out in the MLTC COVID-19 Guidance are followed. Per the MLTC COVID-19 Guidance, homes are to abide by the requirements set out in this guidance document and the [Management of Cases and Contacts of COVID-19 in Ontario](#).

It is recommended that RHs ensure that the requirements for case and outbreak management as set out in the MLTC COVID-19 Guidance and the Management of Cases and Contacts of COVID-19 in Ontario are followed.

Management of Symptomatic Individuals

- All individuals in a home who are exhibiting [signs or symptoms](#) consistent with acute respiratory illness including COVID-19 ([see Appendix B](#)) must be advised to immediately self-isolate and must be encouraged to get tested for COVID-19 using a laboratory-based molecular test or a rapid molecular test (such as GeneXpert or ID NOW). Testing with a molecular test is recommended for people with symptoms regardless of their COVID-19 vaccination status, Rapid

antigen tests (RATs) should **not** be used for residents and staff of highest risk settings who are symptomatic.

- **When a resident is symptomatic:** Residents must self-isolate and be placed on Additional Precautions, medically assessed, and tested.
 - **Diagnostic testing:** The list of preferred specimen types for molecular testing is available on the [Public Health Ontario website](#). Swabs should ideally be collected from residents as soon as possible after they develop symptoms (e.g., within 48 hours).
 - All symptomatic residents must be tested for COVID-19, even during non-COVID outbreaks, using a laboratory-based molecular test or a rapid molecular test (e.g., ID NOW COVID-19 or GeneXpert)[†].
 - RATs have a significantly lower sensitivity for COVID-19 than molecular tests and should not be used routinely for residents of LTCHs and RHs.
 - In exceptional circumstances, when access to timely molecular testing is not available, RATs may be performed concurrently to molecular testing to ensure timely implementation of case, contact, and potential outbreak management pending molecular testing results.
 - While a nasopharyngeal swab (NPS) is the preferred collection method, other specimen collection methods, including combined oral and nasal swabbing, may be used to support access to testing and maximize testing uptake.
 - All symptomatic residents with acute respiratory symptoms are eligible for testing of other respiratory viruses for prospective surveillance, using a [multiplex respiratory virus panel \(MRVP\) test](#). During an outbreak, specimens from up to four (4) residents will be accepted for concurrent MRVP testing by PHO Laboratory in order to identify the cause of the outbreak.
 - **If the COVID-19 test results are positive:** see [Case Management](#) below.
 - **If the COVID-19 molecular test and MRVP test are negative:** The resident may discontinue Additional Precautions if there has not been an exposure

[†] Please refer to MOH's [COVID-19 Provincial Testing Guidance](#) for more information on interpreting molecular POCT results..

to COVID-19 and they are afebrile and symptoms are improving for at least 24 hours (48 hours for gastrointestinal symptoms). Continue to monitor the symptomatic resident closely for worsening symptoms.

- o See [Appendix D](#) for a summary.

Table 2: Testing of Symptomatic Residents

| Home Status | COVID-19 Molecular Test | MRVP Test |
|-----------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Not in Outbreak | Test ALL symptomatic residents | Test ALL symptomatic residents |
| In Outbreak | Test ALL symptomatic residents | Test first FOUR residents only |

* See [PHO Laboratory's](#) Respiratory Viruses test information page for more information.

- **When a staff or a visitor is symptomatic:** Symptomatic staff or visitors must not be permitted entry into the home. If they become symptomatic during their shift or visit, they should self-isolate until they can safely leave the home's property and/or be asked to leave immediately. They must be instructed to self-isolate, seek medical assessment as required, and be encouraged to get tested for COVID-19.

Case Management

For LTCHs, refer to section 4 of the Minister's Directive, which states that LTCHs are required to ensure that the requirements for case and outbreak management as set out in the MLTC COVID-19 Guidance are followed. Per the MLTC COVID-19 Guidance, homes are to abide by the requirements set out in this guidance document and the Management of Cases and Contacts of COVID-19 in Ontario.

It is recommended that RHs ensure that the requirements for case and outbreak management as set out in the MLTC COVID-19 Guidance and the Management of Cases and Contacts of COVID-19 in Ontario are followed.

- All individuals who are identified as a [confirmed or a probable COVID-19 case](#) must self-isolate as per the [Management of Cases and Contacts of COVID-19 in Ontario](#). This is regardless of the individuals' COVID-19 vaccination or previously positive status.

- **When a resident tests positive for COVID-19 (irrespective of MRVP results):**
Residents must be self-isolated and placed on Additional Precautions to prevent the spread of infection to others in the home.
 - Individuals requiring self-isolation must be placed in a single room on [Additional Precautions](#). Where this is not possible, individuals may be placed in a room with no more than one (1) other resident who must also be placed in self-isolation on Additional Precautions. For the purposes of self-isolation, there should not be more than two (2) residents placed per room, including 3 or 4 bed ward rooms.
 - Asymptomatic residents living in the same room as the case should be tested and placed on Additional Precautions immediately along with the infected resident under the direction of the local PHU (see [Contact Management](#) below).
- **When a staff or a visitor test positive for COVID-19:** Staff and visitors who receive a positive COVID-19 test result while they are at the LTCH/RH must leave the facility immediately and be directed to self-isolate at their own home.
 - Staff and visitors who are ill or diagnosed with a confirmed COVID-19 infection (by RAT or molecular test) may not be permitted to return to the home until after symptoms resolve and the appropriate self-isolation period has elapsed.
- **Exception for staff on early return to work:** Staff who test positive for COVID-19 may be required to work on early return to work following the policy and guidance issued by the [MLTC](#) and MSAA and [Appendix A of the Management of Cases and Contacts of COVID-19 in Ontario](#).
- Detailed case management for non-COVID-19 respiratory infection outbreaks are outside the scope of this document. See [Control of Respiratory Infection Outbreaks in Long-Term Care Homes, 2018](#) for more information.
- For case definition for influenza and other respiratory infection outbreak in institutions and hospitals, refer to the relevant disease specific chapters in [Ministry of Health's Appendices](#) to the Infectious Diseases Protocol.

Contact Management

- Contact management decisions are made by the local PHU. Accordingly, all individuals who are identified as a close contact of a known case or an outbreak are required to follow the direction of the local PHU.

- A **high-risk contact (HRC)** is defined as a resident who was in contact with a positive case during their period of communicability (within 48 hours prior to symptom onset if symptomatic or 48 hours prior to the specimen collect date if asymptomatic (whichever is earlier/applicable), and until the positive person completed their self-isolation period) AND meet one or more of the following:
 - Received direct care from a staff positive for COVID-19 (unless this interaction meets the definition of a lower-risk exposure below);
 - Close prolonged contact (within 2 metres) with a symptomatic person (e.g., roommates, essential caregivers, visitors) or body fluids of a positive case (e.g., cough, sneeze), without the consistent and appropriate use of PPE.
- A **lower-risk contact** is defined as a resident who was in contact with a positive case during their period of communicability, but the exposure may be lower risk. Examples of lower risk exposures may include:
 - Residents receiving direct care from staff who was positive for COVID-19 when the staff had consistent and appropriate use of masking (a well-fitting medical mask or N95 respirator used for source control) . Factors such as cumulative duration and nature of the contact's exposure may be factored in by the PHU when conducting a risk assessment.
 - Sharing an indoor space with a person with a positive case or in settings where interactions occur (e.g., common room) where public health measures (e.g., masking, physical distancing) are in place.
- When a PHU is conducting a risk assessment, the PHU may deem an exposure high-risk if there were other factors involved that may increase the risk of transmission (e.g., accumulated contact time with the positive case).
- For details on how to identify and manage contacts, refer to [Appendix F](#).
 - All HRCs should be monitored for COVID-19 symptoms and be isolated and tested as per Appendix F.
 - HRCs, regardless of their vaccination status, may discontinue isolation on or after day 5 from last exposure, provided they remain asymptomatic and receive a negative molecular test result taken on or after day 5 from last contact with a positive case.

- Isolate for 10 days from last contact with positive case if testing is declined. If the individual develops symptoms, then the isolation period is 10 days from symptom-onset.
- If there is no evidence to suggest a resident was exposed to a case, testing and isolation may not be required, unless symptoms develop.
- Asymptomatic residents who have been previously infected with COVID-19 (based on a molecular or rapid antigen test) and cleared within the last 90 days are not required to isolate or be tested if they have been in contact with a positive case.

Table 3: Contact Management for LTCH and RH Residents based on Exposure Type

High-risk

| Exposure | Contact Management for LTCH and RH Residents |
|--|---|
| Received direct care from case who did not have appropriate masking | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Isolate until negative molecular test results taken on or after day 5 are received OR for a minimum of 10 days from last contact with case (without testing) |
| Close prolonged contact (<2m) with a symptomatic person (e.g., roommates) of a positive case without the consistent and appropriate use of PPE** | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor for symptoms for 10 days • Molecular test on day 5 • If negative: isolation may be discontinued • If positive: treat as a case |

Lower-risk

| Exposure | Contact Management for LTCH and RH Residents |
|--|---|
| Received direct care from a staff positive with COVID-19 who had consistent and appropriate masking* | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor for symptoms for 10 days. • Isolation not required unless symptoms develop or positive test result |
| Was in a shared indoor space with a case or in a setting where close interactions occur but with public health measures in place | |

*masking for source control is defined as the case wearing well-fitted medical mask or fit-tested N95 respirator appropriately and consistently

**PPE in this situation is defined consistent and appropriate use of a fit-tested N95 respirator and eye protection

- **COVID-19 contact management** should be done as per [Public Health Management of Cases and Contacts of COVID-19 in Ontario](#).
- For contact management for other (non-COVID-19) respiratory viruses, see [Control of Respiratory Infection Outbreaks in Long-Term Care Homes, 2018](#).
 - Contacts of non-COVID-19 respiratory illness cases are not routinely self-isolated.
 - For influenza antiviral prophylaxis, see [PHO's At a Glance: Influenza Antiviral Treatment](#).

Table 4: Contact Management for COVID-19 and Other Respiratory Viruses

| Case tests positive for | If the high-risk contact is a Resident | If the high-risk contact is a Staff/Visitor |
|--|---|--|
| COVID-19 | Refer to Table 3 and Appendix F | Test for COVID-19* Self-isolate as applicable |
| Other respiratory virus (i.e., COVID-19 negative) | Monitor Consider antivirals if influenza | Monitor Consider exclusion/antivirals if influenza and unvaccinated for influenza |

* Test for COVID-19 using laboratory-based molecular test or rapid molecular test. Concurrent testing with RAT may be considered in exceptional circumstances if significant delays are anticipated with molecular test results.

Outbreak Management

For LTCHs, refer to section 4 of the Minister’s Directive, which states that LTCHs are required to ensure that the requirements for case and outbreak management as set out in the MLTC COVID-19 Guidance are followed. Per the MLTC COVID-19 Guidance, homes are to abide by the requirements set out in this guidance document and the [Management of Cases and Contacts of COVID-19 in Ontario](#).

It is recommended that RHs ensure that the requirements for case and outbreak management as set out in the MLTC COVID-19 Guidance and the [Management of Cases and Contacts of COVID-19 in Ontario](#) are followed. The local PHU is responsible for investigating (e.g., determining when cases are epidemiologically linked), declaring, and managing outbreaks under the HPPA. As such, the local PHU directs and coordinates the outbreak response. LTCHs and RHs must adhere to any guidance provided by the local PHU with respect to implementation of any additional measures to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission in the setting.

Additional information can be found in [Public Health Management of Cases and Contacts of COVID-19 in Ontario](#).

Detailed outbreak management for non-COVID-19 respiratory infection outbreaks is out of scope for this document. See [Control of Respiratory Infection Outbreaks in Long-Term Care Homes, 2018](#) for more information. For surveillance outbreak definitions and for influenza and other respiratory infection outbreaks in institutions

and hospitals, refer to the relevant disease specific chapters in [Ministry of Health's Appendices](#) to the Infectious Diseases Protocol.

Declaring an Outbreak

- Surveillance definitions of **COVID-19 outbreaks** in LTCH/RH are as follows:
 - **A suspect outbreak** in a home is defined as:
 - one positive molecular test OR rapid antigen test in a resident
 - **A confirmed outbreak** in a home is defined as:
 - two or more residents and/or staff/other visitors in a home (e.g., floor/unit) each with a positive molecular test OR rapid antigen test result AND with an epidemiological link*, within a 10-day period.

*Epidemiological link defined as: reasonable evidence of transmission between residents/staff/other visitors AND there is a risk of transmission of COVID-19 to residents within the home.
 - **Note:** the definitions above are for surveillance purposes only. PHUs have the discretion to declare a suspect or a confirmed outbreak based on the results of their investigation, including when the above definitions are not completely met.
 - For greater clarity, staff cases are those whose COVID-19 infection was deemed due to workplace exposure (i.e., acquisition in the home) by workplace health and safety, the PHU, or the IPAC team.
 - For the purposes of outbreak management, if a staff assessment is not possible to determine the source of acquisition and there is no evidence to support an epidemiological link to the home, the PHU has the discretion to presume staff COVID-19 infections were not acquired in the home during periods of high community transmission.
 - The home's workplace health and safety and/or IPAC team has a duty to report an employee case as per OHS and WSIB requirements.
 - All positive molecular test or RAT results in residents, staff, or visitors associated with a suspect or confirmed outbreak in the home must be reported to the PHU and Outbreak Management Team.
 - During a suspect or confirmed outbreak, homes should continue to conduct enhanced symptom assessment (minimum twice daily) of all

residents to facilitate early identification and management of ill residents.

- Declaring a COVID-19 outbreak may not be necessary in certain scenarios such as:
 - When a resident has tested positive during their self-isolation period following their admission or transfer and has been under Droplet and Contact Precautions for the entirety of this period.
 - When the source of COVID-19 acquisition for staff cases are deemed to have reasonably occurred outside the workplace and there is no evidence of transmission or an epidemiological link to resident cases in the home.
- For greater clarity,
 - Declaration of an outbreak (suspected or confirmed) is not required to implement enhanced measures at the discretion of the Outbreak Management Team or as directed by the local PHU (e.g., enhanced disease surveillance, IPAC measures).
 - Negative RAT results should not be used independently to rule out COVID-19 in an outbreak situation due to its limited sensitivity and the increased pre-test probability of COVID-19. If a RAT is used for a staff or resident with symptoms or high-risk exposure (e.g., in extraordinary circumstances when access to timely PCR testing is not available), molecular testing should also be performed in parallel.

Suspect Outbreak Management

- Suspect outbreak management should include the following measures:
 - Case and their high-risk of exposure contacts (e.g., roommates, dining/ activity cohort, staff who cared for the case without appropriate and consistent PPE) should be tested and managed appropriately as per the section on [Contact Management](#);
 - Staff and residents must be [cohorted](#) to limit the potential spread of COVID-19;
 - Increased cleaning and disinfection practices (e.g., at least two times a day for high touch surfaces and when visibly dirty);
 - Additional testing at discretion of PHU; and
 - Additional control measures at discretion of PHU.

Confirmed Outbreak Management

- Once an outbreak is declared, the local PHU will direct testing and public health management of all those impacted (staff, residents, and visitors) using a risk-based approach. It is important to consider both the COVID-19 risk to residents and the potential harm of resident isolation and testing when implementing public health measures (e.g., facility-wide versus limiting to floors/units where appropriate).
- Confirmed outbreak management should include the following steps at minimum:
 - Defining the outbreak area of the home (e.g., floor or unit or whole facility) and cohorting based on COVID-19 status (i.e., infected or exposed and potentially incubating). Additional information on cohorting during an outbreak can be found in the section below;
 - Assessing risk of exposure to residents/staff based on cases' interactions, and in consideration of factors such as exposed resident/staff COVID-19 vaccination status and whether cases are infected with a variant of concern with known immune/vaccine escape potential;
 - Enhanced monitoring for new symptoms in all residents and staff in the outbreak area;
 - Conducting weekly [IPAC self-audits](#)
 - Facilitate assessment of IPAC and outbreak control measures by health system partners as applicable;
 - Increased cleaning and disinfection practices (e.g., at least two times a day and when visibly dirty for high touch surfaces);
 - The need for staff to follow [Additional Precautions](#) for all resident interactions in the outbreak area;
 - Modification of dining and indoor social activities (as applicable);
 - Limiting or restricting new admissions and transfers; and
 - Limiting or restricting visitors, depending on the nature of the outbreak.
- At the discretion of the PHU and where operationally feasible for the home:
 - Group activities, dining, and other social gathering may continue/resume in areas of the home (e.g., floors/units) not affected by the outbreak.

- Group activities/gatherings within an outbreak area of the home (e.g., floors/units) may continue/resume for specific cohorts (e.g., previously infected with COVID-19). Considerations may include:
 - Appropriate staff cohorting can be maintained;
 - There have been no concerns raised on the IPAC audits of the homes that are unaddressed; or,
 - Residents within the cohort are able to adhere to public health measures (e.g., masking).
- Activities for residents in isolation may continue/resume. For example:
 - 1:1 walks in an empty hallway with HRC or case and staff or essential caregiver, both with appropriate use of PPE.
 - Staff or essential caregiver supported visits to a designated room other than the residents' room where others are not occupying or travelling through.

Cohorting in an Outbreak Setting

- [Cohorting](#) is an important part of an overall IPAC approach within a home to limit the potential transmission throughout the home in the event of an introduction of an infection.
- Best practice is for staff who have worked in an outbreak setting in another facility (e.g., acute care, another LTCH or a RH) should not work in other facilities for the duration of the outbreak, regardless of their COVID-19 vaccination status. This is to limit the risk of COVID-19 transmission across homes/facilities.
 - Where this is not possible, staff should be assigned to also work in an outbreak area at the second location, be actively screened every day, and be rapid antigen tested every day.

Diagnostic Testing for Outbreak Management

- Local PHUs are responsible for making recommendations on and facilitating outbreak testing using a risk-based approach based on exposures (e.g., affected outbreak floor/unit).
- If access to timely molecular testing is not available, RATs may be collected to facilitate timely outbreak management. Molecular testing should be done concurrently for confirmation. Asymptomatic individuals who initially test negative should be re-tested if they subsequently develop symptoms.

- The use and frequency of point prevalence testing during time of high community transmission should consider the potential for identification of incidental detection of COVID-19 among staff and residents and ongoing testing that may already be occurring among staff.
- Residents and staff who were previously infected with COVID-19 in the last 90 days (confirmed by molecular or rapid antigen testing) should be excluded from point prevalence testing, unless they develop symptoms.
- In the event of ongoing transmission in an outbreak, following the initial testing at the time of outbreak declaration, repeat testing of all residents and staff who initially tested negative should be conducted within 3-7 days from when the initial testing was conducted. If additional cases or symptomatic individuals are identified, continue repeat testing of residents and staff who tested negative every 3-7 days until no new cases are identified. Testing with a molecular test is recommended.
- PHUs are responsible for following usual outbreak notification steps to the PHO Laboratory to coordinate/facilitate outbreak testing and ensuring an outbreak number is assigned.

Declaring the Outbreak Over

- The outbreak may be declared over by the PHU when there are no new cases in residents or staff linked to exposures in the home after 10 days (maximum incubation period) from the latest of:
 - Date of self-isolation of the last resident case; OR
 - Date of illness onset of the last resident case; OR
 - Date of last shift at work for last staff case.
- For greater clarity, if staff continue to test positive for COVID-19 (i.e., a staff presumed or linked to a community exposure), the outbreak may be declared over at the discretion of the PHU, provided there is no evidence of transmission to residents.
- In homes with ongoing transmission and/or evidence of increased severity of illness, the PHU may require 14 days to elapse before the outbreak is declared over.
- Following the end of an outbreak, please see PHO's guidance document on [De-escalation of COVID-19 Outbreak Control Measures in Long-Term Care Homes and Retirement Homes](#).

Occupational Health & Safety

Staff Exposure/Staff Illness

- See the screening section of this document if there any staff who fail active screening.
- Staff who test positive for COVID-19 should report their illness to their manager/supervisor or to Occupational Health designate as per usual practice. Homes must report all suspect and confirmed cases of COVID-19 to their local PHU.
 - The manager/supervisor or Occupational Health designate must promptly inform the Infection Control Practitioner or designate of any cases or clusters of staff including contract staff who are absent from work.
 - Employers should support workers with symptoms and/or illness to self-isolate.
- Staff who have been diagnosed with COVID-19, have COVID-19 symptoms, or are a high-risk contact with some who is COVID-19 positive should notify their manager/supervisor or Occupational Health in consultation with their health care provider.
 - Staff must report to Occupational Health prior to return to work. Detailed general occupational health and safety guidelines for COVID-19 are available on the MOH [COVID-19 website](#).
- Symptomatic staff who decline testing should follow directions provided by their employer, manager/supervisor, and/or Occupational Health.
- Further guidance can be found in [Public Health Management of Cases and Contacts of COVID-19 in Ontario](#).
- Staff who are on early return to work must follow the protocols and requirements for early return to work as outlined in [Appendix A of the Management of Cases and Contacts of COVID-19 in Ontario](#), and their sector-specific requirements or policy on Test to Work/early return to work.

Reporting staff illness

- Workers who are unwell should report their illness-related absence to their supervisor or employer.
- In accordance with the *OHS*A and its regulations, if an employer is advised that a worker has an occupational illness or that a claim has been filed with the

Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) by or on behalf of the worker with respect to an occupational illness, the employer must provide written notice within four days to:

- A Director appointed under the OHS Act of the MLTSD.
 - The workplace's joint health and safety committee (or a health and safety representative).
 - The worker's trade union, if any.
- This may include providing notice for an infection that is acquired in the workplace.
 - In accordance with the WSIA, the employer must also report any instance of an occupationally acquired disease to the WSIB within 72 hours of receiving notification of said illness.
 - For more information, please contact the MLTSD:
 - Employment Standards Information Centre: Toll-free: 1-800-531-5551
 - Health and Safety Contact Centre: Toll-free: 1-877-202-0008
 - For more information from the WSIB, please refer to the following:
 - Telephone: 416-344-1000 or Toll-free: 1-800-387-0750.

Appendix A: Summary for Active Screening Practices for Homes

| | Staff and Visitors | Current Residents |
|--|---|---|
| Who does this include? | <p>Staff and all visitors, including caregivers, students, and volunteers.</p> <p>Exception is provided to first responders, who should, in emergency situations, be permitted entry to the home without screening.</p> | Residents currently living in the home. |
| What are the screening practices? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct active screening before they are allowed to enter the home. should ask the questions listed in the COVID-19 Screening Tool for Long-Term Care Home and Retirement Homes. • For LTCHs, testing must be in accordance with Minister's Directive: COVID-19 response measures for long-term care homes and COVID-19 guidance document for long-term care homes in Ontario. • Temperature checks are not required. • All visitors entering the home should adhere to the home's visitor policies, where applicable. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct symptom assessment of all residents at least once daily, including temperature checks, to identify if any resident has symptoms of COVID-19, including any atypical symptoms as listed in the Management of Cases and Contacts of COVID-19 in Ontario. • All residents returning from an absence must be actively screened at entry upon their return. |

| | Staff and Visitors | Current Residents |
|---|--|--|
| <p>What if someone does not pass screening (i.e., screens positive)?</p> | <p>Staff and visitors who are showing symptoms of COVID-19 or had a potential exposure to COVID-19, and have screened positive must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not enter the home, • Be advised to follow public health guidance, and • Be encouraged to be tested, if applicable. | <p>Residents with symptoms of COVID-19 (including mild respiratory and/or atypical symptoms) must be self-isolated on Additional Precautions and tested.</p> <p>For a list of typical and atypical symptoms, refer to the Management of Cases and Contacts of COVID-19 in Ontario.</p> |

Appendix B: Clinical Presentation for Respiratory Tract Infections

Adapted from the [Control of Respiratory Infection Outbreaks in Long-Term Care Homes, 2018](#).

| Respiratory Illness | Signs and Symptoms | |
|--|--|--|
| <p>COVID-19* and other upper respiratory illness (including common cold, pharyngitis)</p> <p>* For more information on COVID-19 symptoms, refer to the Management of Cases and Contacts of COVID-19 in Ontario.</p> <p>** Not related to receiving a COVID-19 vaccine in the last 48 hours.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fever/abnormal temperature for the resident (typically ≥ 37.8 C) • Chills • Cough • Shortness of breath • Decreased or loss of taste and/or smell • Fatigue, tiredness, and/or malaise ** • Muscle aches and pain (myalgia) ** | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Headache • Pink eye (conjunctivitis) • Runny nose (rhinorrhea) • Stuffy nose (nasal congestion) • Sore throat, hoarseness or difficulty swallowing • Abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting, and/or diarrhea • Decreased or loss of appetite |

| Respiratory Illness | Signs and Symptoms |
|--|--|
| <p>Lower respiratory illness (bronchitis, bronchiolitis)</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New or increased cough; • New or increased sputum production; • Abnormal temperature for the resident, or a temperature of $\leq 35.5^{\circ}\text{C}$ or $\geq 37.5^{\circ}\text{C}$; • Pleuritic chest pain; • New physical findings on examination (rales, rhonchi, wheezes, bronchial breathing); <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One of the following to indicate change in status or breathing difficulty: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ new/increased shortness of breath; ○ respiratory rate >25/minute; • Worsening functional or mental status (deterioration in resident's ability to perform activities of daily living or lowering of their level of consciousness). |
| <p>Pneumonia</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interpretation of a chest x-ray as pneumonia, probable pneumonia, or presence of infiltrate. • The resident must have at least two of the signs and symptoms described under lower respiratory tract infection. • Other non-infectious causes of symptoms, in particular congestive heart failure, must be ruled out. |

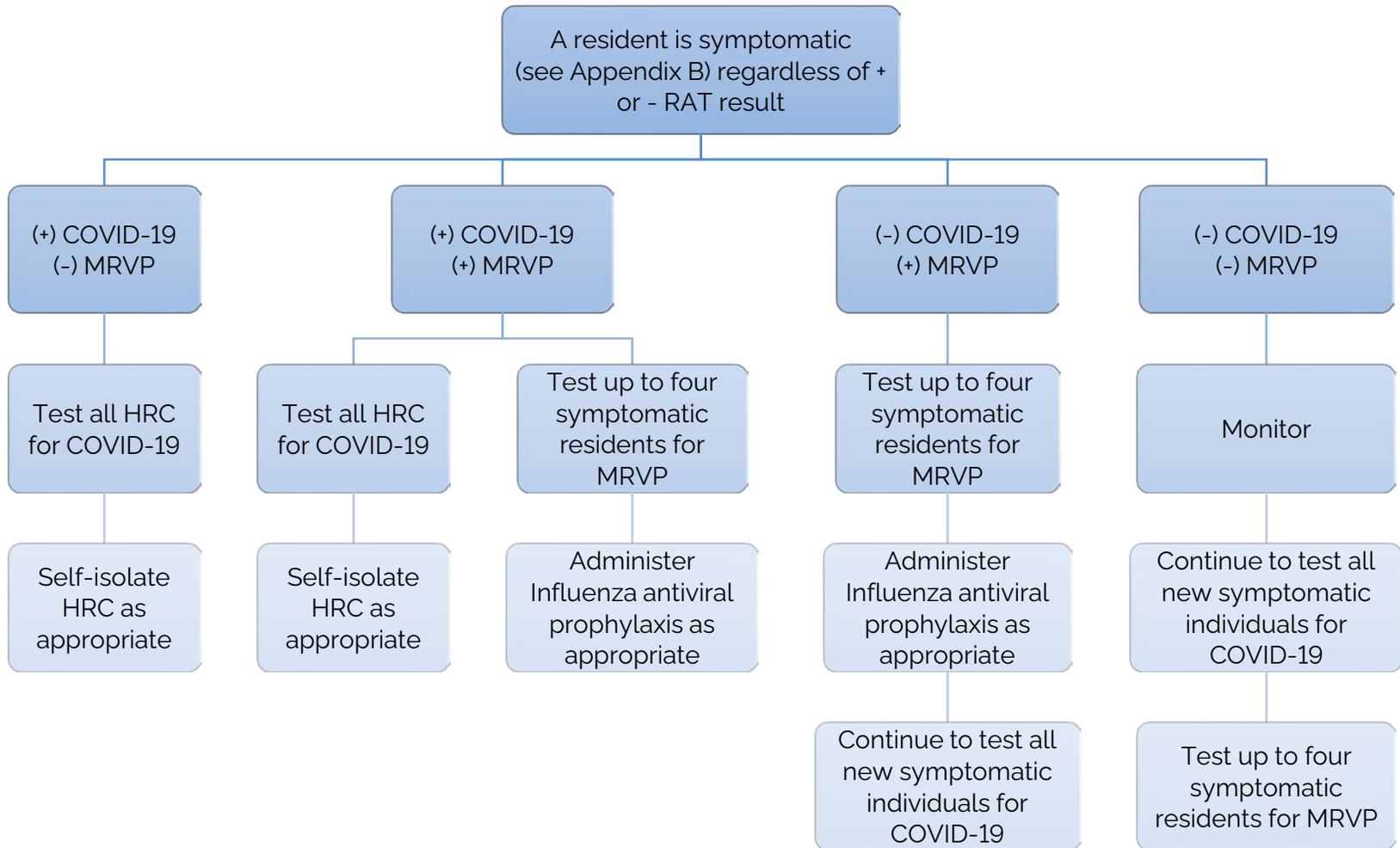
Appendix C: PPE Escalations to the Region and Ministry

The escalation process for acquiring PPE for your organization is as follows:

1. Implement conservation and stewardship strategies: [Ontario Health Recommendations to Optimize PPE Supply](#).
2. Use existing supply chain processes and collaboration with local partners to obtain supplies.
3. Continue with the [Critical PPE Requests-Intake Form](#) to escalate to your Regional Lead.

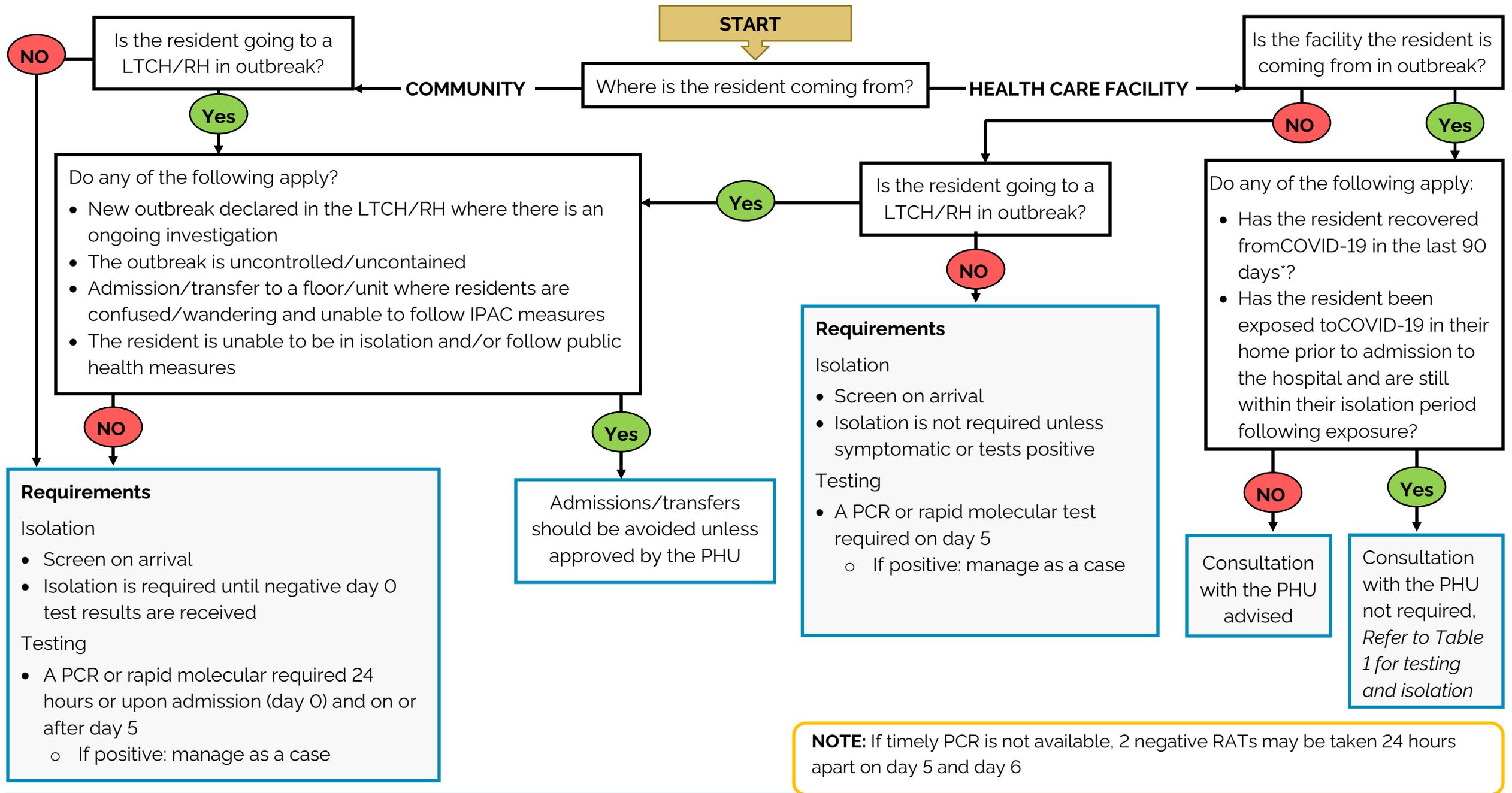
Health service providers are reminded to follow the hierarchy of controls to eliminate or reduce the risks of transmission, and to minimize their need for PPE. Health service providers and employers should be sourcing PPE through their regular supply chain, and they remain responsible for sourcing and providing PPE to their frontline workers. PPE allocation from the provincial pandemic stockpile will continue and PPE can be accessed, within available supply, on an emergency basis for those who have exhausted all efforts to procure their own stock through the established escalation process.

Appendix D: Algorithm for Testing and Management of Acute Respiratory Illness in LTCHs and RHs



Abbreviations: MRVP – Multiplex Respiratory Virus PCR; HRC – high risk contact

Appendix E: Algorithm for Admissions and Transfers for LTCHs and RHs



NOTE: If timely PCR is not available, 2 negative RATs may be taken 24 hours apart on day 5 and day 6

Appendix F: Algorithm for Managing Contacts in LTCHs and RHs

