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RE: Short Stay Absences

Ontario has entered the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. The number of homes in outbreak has more than quadrupled in one month across the province. There are currently 40 homes in outbreak, compared to 13 one month ago. Similarly, 32 Retirements homes are in outbreak – nearly double the number in the middle of August. (Source: Public Health Ontario, Weekly Epidemiologic Summary Reports). In response to certain ‘hot spots’, the Premier announced that as of October 5, only staff, essential caregivers and essential visitors will be permitted in long-term care homes in the GTA and Ottawa.

Given the increasing risk to residents, family members, visitors and team members associated with the rapidly escalating rate of new cases in Ontario now surpassing the height of the first wave this past spring, we must begin to reintroduce measures that will ensure we continue to provide the safest possible environment.

As a result, ***effective Thursday, October 1, we are halting all Short Stay Absences, except for medical appointments.***

This decision was not made lightly. It reflects an abundance of caution, taking into consideration the tragic impacts on long term care so far this year. At the same time, we understand how important it is to maintain contact; we do not want to return to the full lockdown situation we all endured in the spring. We are therefore continuing to support:

- Outdoor visits
- Indoor visits
- Virtual visits
- Essential Caregiver visits
- Temporary absences (resident required to isolate for 14 days upon return)

We encourage you to review the visiting policy for each option, and to be vigilant in observing the recommendations to protect everyone: wear a mask, maintain social distancing, engage in frequent hand hygiene. We also encourage you to explore the Essential Caregiver program, which helps to maintain personal contact even if the Community experiences an outbreak.

We will continue to carefully monitor the status of the pandemic in the province and region, as well as review visiting policies and follow provincial guidelines, which includes: “Retirement homes are responsible for ensuring residents receive visitors safely to help protect against the risk of COVID-19. Homes are also responsible for establishing and implementing visiting practices that comply with Directive #3 and align with the guidance in this policy. **Retirement homes co-located with a long-term care home will adopt the long-term care home’s visitation policies if those policies are more restrictive**, unless the retirement home and long-term care home are both physically and operationally independent.”

There is the possibility of additional future safety precautions, up to and including restricting visits. However, it is my heartfelt wish to avoid this scenario. To protect everyone’s health and safety, I personally implore everyone to consistently observe the measures we know offer our best opportunity to avoid outbreaks.

As a quick reference, below are the guidelines for visiting. Visits are only possible if the Home is not in outbreak. One positive test places the Home in outbreak. Please review the full policy for details.

**Visiting in long-term care and retirement / assisted living – not in outbreak:**

<p><b>Short absences for medical appointments</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Notify the Director of Care / Charge Nurse of the appointment</li> <li>• COVID-19 test is not required</li> <li>• Isolation upon return is not required</li> <li>• Can have two previously essential caregivers</li> </ul>
<p><b>Temporary absence</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resident may leave for one or more nights</li> <li>• Please advise the Director of Care 48 hours in advance of the absence</li> <li>• The Home must approve all temporary absences</li> <li>• The Home will conduct a risk assessment and, if the absence is declined, will provide notification in writing</li> <li>• Please observe all of the recommended precautions including minimizing the social bubble, everyone wears a mask, observe social distancing and engage in frequent hand hygiene</li> </ul> <p><b>Upon return, the resident:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Must self-isolate for 14 days</li> <li>• Must have a COVID-19 test</li> <li>• Can have one essential caregiver visiting</li> </ul>
<p><b>Outdoor visits</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visitor does not require a COVID-19 test</li> <li>• Visitor to bring and wear a mask at all times, covering the nose, mouth and chin</li> <li>• Visitor must pass active screening</li> <li>• Practice social distancing diligently and engage in frequent hand hygiene</li> <li>• Maximum of two visitors for a minimum of 30 minutes</li> </ul>

<b>Indoor visits</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Indoor visits can be made using the online tool</li><li>• All indoor visits must be scheduled</li><li>• Visitor must wear a surgical mask (supplied by the Home) for the entire duration of the visit</li><li>• Visitor must pass active screening</li><li>• Visitor must practice social distancing and practice hand hygiene</li><li>• Maximum of two visitors; minimum of 30 minutes</li></ul>
<b>Virtual visits</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To arrange a virtual visit, please contact reception</li></ul>
<b>PLEASE NOTE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• If guidelines are not followed, the resident will have to self-isolate for 14 days, and visits will be suspended</li><li>• If a visit results in the resident experiencing COVID-19 symptoms, the resident will be tested and self-isolate for 14 days</li></ul>