

AR 201467

Dear Continuing Care Staff:

COVID-19 has been a test of our endurance, and after two years of living through the COVID-19 pandemic, we are all feeling the burden of the added strain and worry. On behalf of the Ministry of Health and the Albertans we serve, thank you for everything you are doing to protect yourself and the people whom you serve and with whom you work. You make a tremendous difference every day.

We are all looking toward the months ahead with good reason for optimism, and yet the recent Omicron waves remind us that the COVID-19 virus continues to spread and evolve, and we still need to use some precautions. As we transition to a new reality where COVID-19 becomes one of the many viruses that is capable of causing illness and outbreaks, we continue to face the potential for additional waves. Every time transmission rises in our communities, there is additional risk not only to you but especially for those living in the continuing care setting where you work.

I am sure you have seen first hand how vaccination is one of the most important tools to protect against the impacts of COVID-19. As Omicron (and its BA.2 sub-lineage) transmission continues, getting a booster dose, especially if you are at higher risk, is very important. Recent studies indicate that an mRNA COVID-19 vaccine booster dose after a primary series restores waning immunity and increases protection against infection and severe outcomes.

This is why I am encouraging you to stay up to date with your COVID-19 vaccines by receiving all three doses currently recommended for you. If you have not yet had your booster dose, and it has been at least five months since your second dose, and at least three months from a COVID-19 infection, then there is no better time to get your booster.

Our individual actions continue to have a critical impact on the health of others. Staying up-to-date with your COVID-19 vaccines not only provides you with strong protection against severe illness and hospitalization, it also helps to reduce the impact and severity of current and future waves on your residents and co-workers. Even if you have been previously infected with COVID-19, receiving a booster dose will improve your immune response and provide longer-lasting protection.

Scientific evidence, evolving data and expert advice continue to inform the most effective use of COVID-19 vaccines in Canada. Many vaccines, like those against tetanus, hepatitis or influenza, need more than one dose to ensure that our immune systems are fully activated and ready to engage. Although COVID-19 vaccines can not always prevent infection, three doses increases the odds that you will not get infected and, in turn, helps to protect others. A third dose has been shown to provide about 65 per cent protection against infection with Omicron and almost 90 per cent protection against hospitalization and death. A fourth dose is currently recommended for residents of continuing care and anyone age 70 and older, given their increased risk of severe outcomes, but is not recommended for health care workers at this time, based on the advice of the National Advisory Committee on Immunization.

Whether you work in administrative offices or directly with residents, your choices can have a ripple effect that is broader than just the people you interact with directly. I am encouraging you to update your immunizations and get your third dose, if you have not already done so, to be part of a layer of protection around the residents in your care who are at the highest risk of severe outcomes.

Due to the powerful protection that vaccines have provided, we are planning the go-forward approach to managing COVID-19. Learnings from the pandemic and recommendations in the [Facility-Based Continuing Care Review](#) identified that certain public health and safety measures should be incorporated into the normal standards of care to protect residents, staff and visitors. A working group, including stakeholders, have reviewed all the existing public health measures to identify the highest impact measures, which are recommended to be adopted as ongoing routine practice, versus those standards that will be discontinued. Over the coming months, we anticipate being able to share the proposed plan for easing the CMOH Orders.

Thank you again for all that you have done, and continue to do, to make continuing care in Alberta a safe and healthy place to live and work.

Yours sincerely,



Deena Hinshaw, BSc, MD, MPH, CCFP, FRCP
Chief Medical Officer of Health