

January 18, 2021

AR 197713

All Licensed Supportive Living, Long-Term Care and Hospice Operators

RE: Omicron Situation Update

Dear Staff and Operators:

I am writing to provide additional clarity on several topics and update you with respect to the current situation on COVID-19 and Omicron in the province of Alberta. As you are aware, current Orders relevant to these settings are:

- [Order 38-2021](#)- Single Site Order (applies to long-term care and **designated** supportive living).
- [Order 57- 2021](#)- Rapid testing requirements for staff who are close contacts of a confirmed COVID-19 case (applies to long-term care, **designated** supportive living, and hospices).
- [Order 02-2022](#)- Isolation requirements and critical work exception (Five day isolation applies to fully immunized people in all settings *except* residents of **designated** supportive living, hospice and long term care, where the 10 day isolation rule continues to apply independent of immunization status).
- [Order 03- 2022](#)- Operational and Outbreak Standards (applies to long-term care, all **licensed** supportive living, and hospices).

Situation Update

As of January 17, 2022, there are currently 2,815 residents and staff who are positive for COVID-19 which is more than 60 times higher than one month ago. Staff represent approximately two-thirds of the active cases. There are 251 active outbreaks (2 or more cases) which is more than 15 times higher than one month ago. Of these outbreaks, 104 have ten or more active cases. There are currently 61 hospitalizations associated with continuing care outbreaks. This is significantly lower than hospitalizations from continuing care outbreaks in previous waves. Residents were among the first Albertans to receive booster doses in the fall, so this is providing a protective benefit against severe outcomes for residents.

We expect that the peak of this wave is still several weeks away. We are watching the impact of Omicron on this sector very closely and will be making any additional adjustments, as needed.

Staffing Challenges

Given the rapid rise of COVID-19 cases and the anticipated continued rise in cases in the community over the coming weeks, we are aware of the challenges you are facing in staffing your facilities. Staffing decisions and related policies remain the responsibility of individual operators. There are several options to access additional staff that should be implemented sequentially in order to best protect residents and other staff members.

1. Operator level interventions including staff reassignment, offering overtime, accessing contract staff, etc.
2. Accessing exemptions to single site staffing requirements.
3. Critical Worker Exceptions, which allows an expedited return to work under exceptional circumstances, should be used as a last and final resource. **This should not be used in place of single site exemptions.**

Isolation Requirements

As you likely are aware, effective January 3, isolation requirements changed in the province. I want to be clear that these updated isolation requirements do not apply to residents of long-term care, **designated** supportive living and hospices. The existing isolation requirements remain in place. For residents of other **licensed** supportive living sites, the shorter isolation periods apply.

As has always been the case, all symptomatic persons are required to isolate, and are recommended to take a rapid test, if available. Staff in healthcare and congregate living settings (including long-term care, licensed supportive living and hospices) who test positive for COVID-19 on a rapid test or who have symptoms are considered high-risk and are eligible to [book confirmatory PCR testing](#). Operators and staff should review [next steps and direction](#) regarding isolation and repeat testing based on the results of their rapid test. After exhausting local resources, the COVID-19 Coordinated Response Line (1-844-343-0971) can be accessed for support and guidance in managing symptomatic staff members.

The updated provincial COVID-19 isolation requirements ([Order 02-2022](#)) for individuals who test positive for COVID-19 are applicable to the general public, inclusive of your staff, and include the following:

- Fully vaccinated (14 days past 2nd dose of mRNA or another World Health Organization approved vaccine or 14 days past 1 dose of Janssen): Isolate for 5 days from the start of symptoms or until symptoms resolve, whichever is longer, if symptoms are not related to a pre-existing condition. For 5 days following isolation, wear a mask at all times when around others outside of home with no exceptions (e.g. masks cannot be removed to eat or drink in a public setting like work, restaurant, or a shared dining space).
- Not fully vaccinated (do not meet criteria for fully vaccinated above): Isolate for 10 days from the start of symptoms or until they resolve, whichever is longer, if symptoms are not related to a pre-existing condition.

Because of the higher prevalence of complex medical conditions in residents of long term care, hospice, and **designated** supportive living, residents in these facilities must

still complete a 10 day isolation period if they have COVID-19, independent of their immunization status, in order to continue to minimize the risk of COVID transmission in these settings.

You will find an updated screening form to reflect these changes online for [Licensed Supportive Living, Long-Term Care and Hospice Operators](#). Please ensure you are using the most current versions. There will also be an updated [Public Health Disease Management Guideline](#) posted in the near future. Please ensure you check back to access the most current version.

An important recent change to highlight for staff who have tested positive and recovered from their infection, but then following their recovery have been identified as a close contact of a positive case: these staff are exempt from daily rapid antigen testing for a period of 21 days following their return to work post-infection to minimize the risk of false positive results. Following this three-week period, they should be treated the same as other staff who have been identified as close contacts (i.e., subject to daily rapid testing for a period of 10 days as long as they remain asymptomatic; should symptoms develop, regular protocols should be followed).

Thank you for your support and shared commitment to prevent the spread of COVID-19, and for the ongoing hard work you are putting in to keep your residents and staff safe. If you have questions about this, please contact ASAL@gov.ab.ca or call 780-644-8428.

Yours sincerely,



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

cc: Evan Romanow, Assistant Deputy Minister, Health Service Delivery, Alberta Health

Trish Merrithew-Mercredi, Assistant Deputy Minister, Public Health and Compliance, Alberta Health

David O'Brien, Senior Program Officer, Provincial Seniors Health and Continuing Care, Alberta Health Services