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News

# Ontario Makes COVID Vaccination And Random Testing Mandatory For All Long Term Care Employees, Students And Volunteers

 By **Pamela Vanmeer** October 1, 2021



*Lorraine Button receives her vaccine Courtesy - HKPR*

KAWARTHA LAKES-The Ontario government is making COVID-19 vaccinations mandatory for all Long Term Care in-home staff, support workers, students, and volunteers by November 15, 2021, unless a staff member has a valid medical exemption, as well as expanded inspections of homes and redirecting provincial resources to enhance and audit existing testing in homes.

“We know that long-term care residents have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. As new variants continue to spread, we are seeing a growing number of outbreaks in long-term care homes where the risk to those most vulnerable remains high,” said Rod Phillips, Minister of Long-Term Care. “This enhanced suite of measures, including mandatory vaccinations for those working in the homes of long-term care residents, is one more way we will provide them the greatest level of protection possible.”

The province is only allowing two medical exemptions and both require people to have had at least one COVID vaccine, even those who have had life-threatening reactions to other vaccines. Meanwhile, anyone who has had a previous severe reaction to other vaccines cannot receive the COVID vaccine. We will have more on that next week.

Officials say vaccination rates of staff in many homes are not high enough in the face of the risk posed by the Delta variant, and this is putting vulnerable residents at risk. The province is reporting 668 new cases of the virus today. That’s 4.4 cases per 100,000 people.

Mandating vaccination for in-home staff has now become essential according to the province, and homes are now required to meet the following requirements:

- Staff, support workers, students, and volunteers will have until November 15, 2021 to show proof that they have received all required doses of a COVID-19 vaccine, or to show proof of a valid medical exemption.
- Staff who do not have all required doses or a valid medical exemption by the deadline will not be able to enter a long-term care home to work.
- Newly hired staff will be required to be fully vaccinated before they begin working in a home unless they have a valid medical exemption.
- Homes will begin randomly testing fully vaccinated individuals, including staff, caregivers and visitors, to help detect possible breakthrough cases of COVID-19 as early as possible.

In addition to adding randomized testing of vaccinated individuals, homes will continue to regularly test individuals who are not fully vaccinated. The ministry will leverage provincial testing resources to inspect and audit these results by sending testing teams into homes to validate the results that homes have been reporting to the province. The ministry will also step up rigorous inspections of homes' infection, prevention and control measures.

These new measures are the latest tools among a suite of actions the Ministry of Long-Term Care has taken to protect residents in long-term care, including:

- rigorous inspections to reinforce infection prevention and control
- regularly testing all individuals who are not fully vaccinated
- providing a COVID-19 vaccine promotion toolkit available in 12 languages
- organizing mobile clinics at homes with lower vaccination rates and homes experiencing outbreaks
- providing homes with support so they can administer vaccines themselves in a timely manner
- working to increase the hours of direct care for residents to an average of four hours per day by 2024-25
- collecting more accurate vaccination data at the home level
- offering third doses to long-term care residents. As of September 30, 64 per cent of residents have already received their third dose.

Fully vaccinated staff will continue to be able to work in more than one long-term care home, retirement home or other health service provider setting.

Homes will continue to be required to track and report on the implementation of their policies, including overall staff immunization rates. To promote transparency, the Ministry of Long-Term Care is publicly posting [long-term care home staff vaccination rates](#). To protect staff privacy, individual immunization status is not shared with the province.