

Guidelines for Resident Visits with Family in their Homes for Long Term Care Facilities in Nova Scotia

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Purpose

The *Guidelines for Resident visits with Family in their Homes for Long Term Care Facilities in Nova Scotia* has been developed to support long-term care facilities to safely support residents to enjoy off-site day visits with family in their homes.

Please note that this is a supplement to the [COVID-19 Management in Long Term Care Facilities Directive](#). It aligns with the [Health Protection Act Order](#) by the Chief Medical Officer of Health, and [NSH Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\): Infection Prevention & Control Guidelines for Home & Community Care](#), and does not supersede them.

This guidance document is based on the latest available scientific evidence, expert opinion about this emerging disease and local epidemiology. It may change as new information becomes available.

In order to support residents to visit with family in their homes, while minimizing the risk introduction of COVID-19 in long-term care facilities, facility operators should implement the following measures:

- Strengthen existing communication networks with staff, residents, and families;
- Limit the risk of introduction of COVID-19 into the facility using outdoor pick-up and drop-off;
- Limit the introduction of COVID-19 into the facility through the use of screening for COVID-19 symptoms among family members/support persons who are transporting residents, and the collection of information about the intended destination, and duration;
- Encourage masking for all residents (medical masks), families/support persons (non-medical masks) and those whom the resident is visiting (non-medical masks) when physical distancing cannot be maintained;
- Enforce strict adherence to physical distancing and gathering limits;
- Enforce strict compliance with respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene;
- Implement enhanced cleaning and disinfecting of resident mobility equipment.

The goal of implementing these above measures is to, as much as possible, prevent the introduction of COVID-19 into the facility and/or prevent transmission to residents and staff within the facility, while ensuring greater quality of life for residents.

If you have any questions about these Guidelines, contact your local PH office or email COVID19CC@novascotia.ca.

Section 1: Preparing the Resident and Facility

Residents may choose to visit with family in their homes independently, if they are comfortable doing so and have done so in the recent past, and if the family and facility consider it safe to continue to do so.

Residents may participate in off-site visits at their family homes as long as they return the same day. No overnight trips are permitted.

Residents may not visit with family in their homes if it requires them to self-isolate for 14 days upon their return, for example, when traveling outside the Atlantic bubble. The need to self-isolate will depend on the region travelled to and the current [Health Protection Act Order](#) by the Chief Medical Officer of Health.

Pre-Planning

Update staff and resident information

- Create and maintain a current resident list including:
 - name, date of birth, health card number, and contact information
- Create and maintain a Resident off site family visit Log including:
 - date/time of departure from and return to the facility
 - accompanying family member/support person who is transporting the resident, including:
 - name, date of birth, and contact information for individual aiding with transport of the resident to their destination and returning to the long-term care facility
 - the home that will be visited
 - mode of transportation
 - COVID-19 pre-screening results, assessed before the off-site family home visit for the family member/support person who is transporting the resident.
- Create and maintain a current staff (including casual) list including:
 - date of birth, health card number, email, cell phone number
 - other facilities (i.e., long-term care or homecare agencies) where the staff member is currently working

Updated staff and resident information is important to ensure facilities are prepared to quickly and effectively communicate with other staff, families, and Public Health in the event that a resident becomes ill with COVID-19 related symptoms, and to expedite the screening and testing process.

Please note: Staff are not required to provide their health card number to facilities. If staff choose to not provide their health card number, facilities should ask staff to have their health card number on them at all times while working in the event it is needed for contact tracing purposes.

Facilities should have a process for staff or families to escalate concerns regarding residents not following guidelines while engaging in off-site visits with family in their homes.

Preparing Your Space for Resident Pick-Up/Drop-Off

Mandatory Activities

- Review your supply of medical masks and ensure you have enough for residents.
 - Note: for residents leaving the facility, the facility will provide a medical mask for the resident.
- Establish designated areas for resident pick-up and drop-off to occur. Facilities should consider the following:
 - Designating pick-up/drop-off areas to be as close to the entrance as possible; and
 - Installing physical markings to indicate the flow of residents to best facilitate physical distancing during pick-up/drop-off.
- Establish designated areas to administer the Resident off site visit Log and where pre-screening must occur if residents will be accompanied by a family member/support person.
 - Facility operators should consider having screening occur at the door for family members/support persons who are transporting individuals, or when possible, occur via telephone. If family members/support persons who are transporting the resident are screened via telephone, have staff escort the resident to and from the vehicle.
- Establish a designated space and protocol for residents to wash and/or sanitize their hands and receive a medical mask prior to leaving the facility.
- Establish a process for the resident and families to notify the facility when the resident will be leaving to visit with family in their homes.

Preparing Your People for Residents Leaving the Facility – Communication with Staff

Mandatory Activities

- Ensure all staff are informed and understand new procedures for residents to visit with family in their homes. This can be achieved through communications and training. This information should include:
 - Family members/support persons transporting the resident and individuals they visit must wear a non-medical mask during transport, and at any other time as required by the [Health Protection Act Order](#) of the Chief Medical Officer of Health. When travelling in a private vehicle (e.g. family cars), residents are encouraged, but not required, to wear a medical mask.
 - information for residents, family members/support persons transporting the resident, and the individuals they visit, to ensure they comply with physical distancing, gathering limits, proper hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette;
 - communication around the importance that the resident limits interactions with others where physical distancing is not possible, or where it is likely that the ability to practice physical distancing would be compromised for either the resident, the family/support person, , explaining the responsibility for the health and well-being of the resident while off-site;
 - clear, detailed steps on where to meet residents for re-entry into the facility;
 - how to conduct pre-pick up screening for family members/support persons who are transporting the resident;
 - how to safely guide residents to the designated pick-up/drop-off areas in the facility
- Establish and communicate protocols for determining which residents are eligible for off-site visits with family. This decision should be conducted in collaboration with the resident and family, as appropriate.

Note: at this time, residents are encouraged, but not required, to wear medical masks when physical distancing cannot be maintained. Due to the requirement for residents to wear medical masks in areas where physical distancing cannot be maintained, individuals with moderate or

severe dementia or individuals who are unable to wear a mask for medical reasons may be at increased risk for acquiring COVID-19 while away from facility. When making decisions on visits for these individuals, facility operators and families must weigh the benefit of the visit for the resident against the resident's potential risk of COVID-19 exposure and risk for introducing COVID-19 into the facility. This should be determined on a case-by-case basis by the facility operator with the family/resident.

Establish and communicate a protocol for masking requirement for residents that aligns with Public Health messaging.

Recommended Activities

- Update website and internal message boards with information about off site visits with family in their home.
- Consider asking residents/substitute decision maker(s) to minimize the number of family members/support persons who are transporting the resident or having close contact with the resident, to minimize potential exposures among residents and staff.
- Appropriate signage should be placed at the designated pick-up/drop-off spots. Signage should inform residents and family/support persons on:
 - Symptoms of COVID-19
 - Expectations for residents and family members/support persons who are transporting residents
 - Physical distancing requirements
 - Proper hand hygiene (please see Appendix A)
 - Respiratory etiquette
 - How to wear a mask (for non-medical and medical masks - please see Appendix B)

Preparing Your People for Residents Leaving the Facility – Communication with Residents and Families

Planning must be completed before residents can leave the facility to visit with family in their homes. Facilities are to implement these visits for residents in a way that protects and supports both the residents and facility staff. To achieve this, facilities must do the following:

- Ensure residents are given a choice and feel supported with their choice to leave the facility to visit with family in their homes.
- Ensure residents and their families, support networks or care providers are engaged in discussions regarding any modifications and their concerns moving forward.

Mandatory Activities

- Ensure residents and family/support persons are communicated with on the expectations to visit with family in their homes. This should include the following information:
 - The need for residents to wear a medical mask where physical distancing cannot be maintained, or any other time as required by the current [Health Protection Act Order](#) by the Chief Medical Officer of Health. When travelling in a private vehicle (e.g. family cars) or at the visit, residents are encouraged, but not required, to wear a medical mask. Medical masks will continue to be provided for residents by facilities for this purpose. The need for family/support persons and all individuals in the vehicle to wear a non-medical mask during transportation, or any other time as required by the current [Health Protection Act Order](#) of the Chief Medical Officer of Health.

- The expectation that family members are not to enter the facility unless necessary and instead are expected to drop off/pick-up their resident in the designated locations.
 - Communication about the importance that the resident limit interactions with others and where physical distancing is not possible, or where it is likely that the ability to practice physical distancing would be compromised for either the resident, the family, , explaining the responsibility for the health and well-being of the resident while off-site;
 - The expectation that families will observe all relevant limitations on physical distancing, gathering limits and observe current public health recommendations regarding hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette.
 - The expectation that families will observe any agreements on the duration of the visit.
- Communicate with residents and families/support persons the process to collect information about where the resident has been, identify any potential exposures to COVID-19, challenges to adhering to the requirements, etc.
 - Communicate with families/support persons the expectations for pre-transportation screening.
 - Establish a process to capture the resident’s needs, such as transportation aids (i.e., wheelchairs or walkers) when visiting with family. .
 - If the resident needs to have transportation aids, communicate with the resident and family that upon arrival to or re-entry to the facility, the equipment will need to be cleaned and disinfected.
 - Make information easily accessible on the facility’s website, as well as provided to residents and their families in writing/by email.

Service providers can find templates to communicate this information to families in Appendix C.

Preparing Your People for Residents Leaving the Facility – Training for Staff

Mandatory Activities

- Continue to provide education for staff on Public Health guidelines on topics such as:
 - COVID-19 transmission
 - Handwashing protocols and procedures
 - Cleaning and disinfection procedures
 - Information on how to properly don/doff masks. Note, resources are available at [NSH Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Resources](#).

Section 2: Supporting Residents in Safe Off Site Visits with Family

Screening

Mandatory Activities

Residents do not need additional screening before they leave for visits or on their return, as they are actively screened twice a day, as per the [COVID-19 Management in Long Term Care Facilities Directive](#).

Family members/support persons who are transporting individuals must be screened on arrival, according to the screening of visitors as indicated in Section 2.0 of the [COVID-19 Management in Long Term Care Facilities Directive](#). If the individual has answered YES to any one of the questions on the 811

assessment tool, the individual will not be able to transport the resident at this time, and must be directed to contact 811.

A resident or family member/support person who is transporting the resident who has a chronic stable cough, sneeze, running nose, or nasal congestion, that is unchanged and clearly linked to a known medical condition such as asthma or allergies, may still be able to participate in off site visits or transport the resident. Please discuss with your management team and inform the resident and families, if applicable, with the final decision.

No resident will be able to participate in a visit with family in their homes if they are exhibiting any signs or symptoms of COVID-19, as determined using the relevant screening procedure. The exception to this is if a resident requires access to the community for medical appointments or testing and will be assessed on a case by case basis by the facility staff.

Masking

Family members/support persons who are transporting residents to and from their destination must wear and are expected to provide their own non-medical mask. Individuals with whom the resident intends to have close contact (less than 2 metres/6 feet) must wear a non-medical mask.

Residents participating in family home visits are encouraged, but not required, to wear a medical mask when travelling in private vehicles (e.g. family car) and when physical distancing cannot be maintained while visiting with family and friends.

Physical Distancing

Staff must communicate to residents and family/support person (if applicable) the importance of maintaining a physical distance of two (2) metres between themselves and others for the entire duration of the family home visit. While it is expected that the resident practices physical distancing for the majority of their visit, visits will allow for limited physical contact when masked (e.g. a quick hug, shaking hands with appropriate hand hygiene measures, etc.)

- It is recognized that following physical distancing requirements may be difficult for some residents. This should not prohibit them participating in family home visits. In these cases, best efforts should be made to maintain physical distance, while acknowledging it is always not possible.

Respiratory Etiquette and Hand Hygiene

Ensure that residents and families understand and are provided with up-to-date information and education on the measures to support safe visits with family including hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette. Certain supplies must be made available for residents by the facility operators.

Mandatory Supplies

- Medical masks for residents
- Hand sanitizer

Families/support persons are expected to provide their own non-medical mask. Facilities may decide to have additional non-medical masks available for family members/support persons to ensure they do not need to turn away individuals who are trying to accompany the resident for their visit with family, in the event the individual arrives to pick up their resident without a mask. Facilities are encouraged to provide

travel hand sanitizer for residents, to encourage frequent hand hygiene after contact with high-touch surfaces.

Resident Equipment–Cleaning and Disinfecting

To find the current guidance on handling resident’s personal equipment, please refer to [NSH Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\): Infection Prevention & Control Guidelines for Home & Community Care](#).

Only essential equipment should be used by residents when leaving the facility for visits with family in their homes. Equipment must be cleaned and disinfected by staff with an appropriate disinfectant before and after each use. A list of appropriate disinfectants can be found at [Health Canada - Hard Surface Disinfectants and Hand Sanitizers \(COVID-19\)](#).

- Staff should use disposable gloves when cleaning surfaces.
- Consider how to limit who can use equipment.

Education for Residents and Families

Prior to the resident leaving the facility, staff should provide education to both residents and their family/support person, if applicable, on the requirement of physical distancing, gathering limits, proper hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette and the use of non-medical masks for the duration of their family home visit and the importance of maintaining physical distancing.

Staff must communicate to families that should they become ill in the two (2) weeks following their interaction with the resident while visiting with family in their homes, the individual must contact 811 for screening and assessment for testing, and notify the facility as a precaution. Should the individual test positive for COVID-19, the individual must inform Public Health during their investigation that they had interaction with a resident of the facility.

Section 3: Resident Transportation Guidelines

Service providers, support staff, family or friends who are offering residents transportation to and from the facility must follow safe transportation practices.

Mandatory Activities

- All facility operated vehicles or vehicles contracted by providers to provide transport to residents must be cleaned and disinfected (i.e., high touch surfaces) between outings.
- If residents are travelling in a private vehicle (i.e., with family), the driver must verify that the vehicle has been cleaned and disinfected, with a focus on high touch surfaces.
 - Facilities should re-iterate this requirement when family is arranging a pick-up time for their resident.
 - Staff must provide families with directions on how to properly clean and disinfect their vehicle and should provide families with the list of appropriate disinfectants at [Health Canada - Hard Surface Disinfectants and Hand Sanitizers \(COVID-19\)](#).
- The driver of the vehicle and all passengers must wear a non-medical mask for the duration of transport. The resident must wear a medical mask during transportation, although when travelling in

a private vehicle (e.g. family cars), residents are encouraged, but not required, to wear a medical mask.

- The driver and passengers must sit as far apart as possible, minimizing the number of passengers in the vehicle, where possible.
- When using public transportation, such as Metro Transit or accessible transportation, the resident must follow all municipal transit guidelines, maintain safe physical distance, wear a medical mask and should frequently use hand sanitizer after contact with high touch surfaces.

Recommended Activities

- For facility-operated transport services, the facility should keep a log of the residents transported to and from the facility. This log should include resident's name, and date and time of transport or departure.

Section 4: Procedure for Return of Resident

Mandatory Activities

Isolation after returning from a visit with family in their homes is not necessary, unless required by Public Health.

- Confirm and update the information captured in the Resident off site family visit Log at departure including:
 - date/time of return to the facility
 - name of family member/supporting person who is transporting the resident, including name, date of birth, and contact information
 - mode of transportation

In addition, please record:

- For destinations visited:
 - Whether the relevant requirements for masking, physical distancing, gathering limits and hand hygiene were followed, or if it was not possible to follow these requirements
 - The approximate arrival and departure times for destinations visited during the visit
- If, during the visit, has there been any contact with someone who is suspected or confirmed positive, e.g.:
 - Someone with confirmed COVID
 - Someone who is waiting for test results
 - Someone who is currently self-isolating or is required to self-isolate

If the individual answered YES to any question, or if they have any questions or concerns, please immediately contact NSH Public Health and isolate the resident.

Staff must communicate to families that should they become ill in the two (2) weeks following their interaction with the resident, the individual must contact 811 for screening and assessment for testing, and notify the facility as a precaution. Should the individual test positive for COVID-19, the individual must inform Public Health during their investigation that they had interaction with a resident of the facility.

Section 5: What to do if a Resident Returns to Facility with Symptoms of COVID-19

Reporting the Suspected COVID-19 Case

To find current guidance for reporting a suspected COVID-19 case, please refer to the [COVID-19 Management in LTCF Directive](#) and advise the resident's family.

Note: 811 is not to be contacted for residents with COVID-19 symptoms. If staff have concerns regarding resident and staff testing or symptoms, they should contact their local Public Health office.

Reporting to Public Health

During contact tracing of a positive COVID-19 case (staff or resident), the LTCF must report all resident transfers and family home visits during the 14 days preceding resident re-entry.

Temporary Suspension of Off Site Visits with Family

If a resident is displaying symptoms of COVID-19, treat as a suspect case of COVID-19 and immediately discontinue that resident's visits. The resident will not be able to participate in visits with family in their homes if they are exhibiting any signs or symptoms of COVID-19. The exception to this is if a resident requires community access for medical appointments or testing and will be assessed on a case by case basis by the facility staff. Visits with family in their homes for other residents may continue at this time.

Visits with family will be re-instated when COVID-19 test results confirm the individual is COVID-19 negative and symptoms resolve. The required time for a resident to be considered resolved of their symptoms must be determined by the facility's Medical Director.

Communicating with Staff, Residents and Families

In the event that COVID-19 is identified and/or confirmed among a resident through testing, Public Health will conduct contact tracing and will advise the facility operators on next steps.

If directed by Public Health, begin communicating with affected staff, program residents, and families.

Communicate with impacted staff:

- Explain immediate next steps.
- Consider sequence to ensure those most directly impacted are notified first.

Prepare and communicate to all facility staff and residents:

- Prepare message for use with residents/family of the affected facility.
- Speak to residents and contact families.

PROPER HAND WASHING

Washing your hands frequently with soap and water is the best way to reduce the spread of germs.



Wet your hands with warm running water



Add soap and scrub for 15–20 seconds



Wash backs, thumbs, between fingers, and under nails



Rinse off soap under running water



Dry your hands with a clean towel



Turn off tap with a towel

When soap and water are not available, alcohol-based hand sanitizers can be used if hands are not visibly soiled.

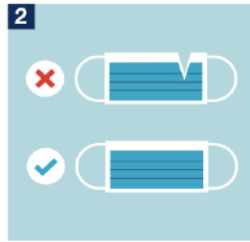


Appendix B: How to Wear a Mask (Medical and Non-Medical Masks)

HOW TO WEAR A PROCEDURE MASK



1 Wash your hands with soap and water for 20-30 seconds or perform hand hygiene with alcohol-based hand rub before touching the face mask.



2 Check the new mask to make sure it's not damaged.



3 Ensure colour side of the mask faces outward.



4 Locate the metallic strip. Place it over and mold it to the nose bridge.



5 Place an ear loop around each ear or tie the top and bottom straps.



6 Cover mouth and nose fully, making sure there are no gaps. Pull the bottom of the mask to fully open and fit under your chin.



7 Press the metallic strip again to fit the shape of the nose. Perform hand hygiene.



8 Do not touch the mask while using it. If you do, perform hand hygiene.



9 Replace the mask if it gets wet or dirty and wash your hands again after putting it on. Do not reuse the mask.

Removing the Mask

1 Perform hand hygiene.

2 Do not touch the front of your mask. Lean forward, gently remove the mask from behind by holding both ear loops or ties.

3 Discard the mask in a waste container.

4 Perform hand hygiene.

These materials were adapted with permission from the BCCDC and the British Columbia Ministry of Health.



NON-MEDICAL MASKS

Keeping each other safe is more important than ever. Wearing a non-medical mask is now mandatory in most indoor public places. Here's how to safely wear and care for your non-medical, reusable mask.



Ensure the mask is made of at least two layers of tightly woven fabric.



Inspect the mask for tears or holes. Ensure mask is clean and dry.



Wash or sanitize your hands before and after touching the mask.



Use the ties or ear loops to put the mask over your mouth and nose.



The mask should fit snugly to the cheeks and cover your nose and mouth. There should be no gaps.



Avoid touching your face while wearing the mask.



Wash or sanitize your hands if you touch the mask and before and after removing the mask.



Remove the mask by the ties or ear loops. Avoid touching the front of the mask.



Store the mask in a clean place if wearing it again.



Wash the mask with hot, soapy water and let dry completely. Masks can be included with laundry.

Mask Don'ts

- ✗ Don't reuse masks that are moist, dirty or damaged
- ✗ Don't touch your mask while wearing it
- ✗ Don't hang the mask from your neck or ears
- ✗ Don't leave your used mask within reach of others
- ✗ Don't wear a loose mask
- ✗ Don't remove your mask to talk to someone
- ✗ Don't share your mask
- ✗ Don't wear a face shield instead of a mask

A mask alone cannot prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Be sure to:

- Stay home if you feel unwell
- Maintain physical distance as much as possible
- Wash or sanitize your hands often
- Use proper cough or sneeze etiquette
- Avoid touching your face, mouth, nose and eyes

Appendix C: Communication Messaging and Letter Templates

Initial Letter to Families: Off-site Visits to Family Homes

We are very pleased to let you know that the Province of Nova Scotia is now allowing residents of Long-Term Care Facilities to visit with family in their homes.

Residents and their family members/support persons are required to abide by physical distancing requirements, gathering limits, hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette, and to wear a mask when physical distancing cannot be maintained. A reminder of measures to help keep your loved one safe, such as physical distancing, gathering limits, hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette, will be provided at pick up.

Only residents who are not required to self-isolate and who are not demonstrating signs or symptoms of COVID-19 or other illnesses will be permitted to participate in visits.

Please notify the facility of plans to visit with family in their homes. If a resident intends to leave the facility to visit with family, we ask that you notify the facility in advance to arrange a pick-up and drop-off time. Should the resident's visit be cancelled for any reason, please notify the facility in a timely manner.

Please help keep your loved ones, and our staff, safe.

We look forward to seeing you soon.

Confirmation Letter: Picking-Up a Resident for an off site Visits with Family

Dear [insert individual name(s)]:

This is to confirm that you will be picking up [insert resident name] on [insert date] at [insert time] for a visit with family in your home.

Pick-up will occur at [insert location]. Family members and all those who will be in the vehicle at the time of pick-up will be required to wear a non-medical mask. Residents are encouraged, but not required, to wear a medical mask while travelling in a private vehicle (e.g. family cars) and during the visits when physical distancing cannot be maintained. Medical masks will continue to be provided for residents by facilities for this purpose. Residents must continue to follow other public transportation guidelines.

Before you pick up your resident, you must:

- arrive at your scheduled time and wait in the marked area
- undergo screening by a staff member for signs and symptoms of COVID-19, consistent with the screening process for visitors to long-term care facilities
- confirm that you understand the possible impacts of COVID-19 and the importance of masking, physical distancing, gathering limits, hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette to prevent unknowingly transmitting the virus to your loved one
- provide information on intended destinations, and be prepared to confirm or update that information when the resident returns

Residents and their family members/support persons are required to abide by physical distancing requirements, gathering limits, hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette, and to wear a mask (medical masks for the resident will be provided by the facility, and non-medical masks will be the responsibility of individuals who will be in contact with the resident) when physical distancing cannot be maintained.

Should you become ill in the two weeks following time spent with the resident, you must contact 811 for screening and assessment for testing and notify the facility as a precaution. Should you test positive for COVID-19, you must inform Public Health during their investigation that you have spent time with a resident of our Long-Term Care Facility.

Please help keep your loved ones, and our staff, safe.

We look forward to seeing you soon.