

Long-term care visitor restrictions eased – July 17

Messages

- COVID-19 has been particularly difficult on those who live and work in long-term care, as well as their loved ones.
- Restrictions were put in place to protect some of our most vulnerable, but we know they have taken a toll.
- With safety as our top priority, it's time to bring some normalcy back into the lives of those in long-term care.

Q&As

What are the changes to visitation at long-term care facilities?

We're revising the provincial directive to the long-term care sector to ease some of the restrictions that have been in place during the pandemic.

Outdoor visits (expanded)

- allow five visitors per resident (up from two)
- everyone must wear a mask
- everyone must practice physical distancing, except for brief contact like a hug
- visits must be pre-scheduled with the facility

Indoor visits (new)

- residents or their substitute decision makers can designate three people as visitors; only one may visit at a time
- everyone must wear a mask
- everyone must practice physical distancing, except for brief contact like a hug
- visits must be pre-scheduled with the facility
- facilities must designate a location for the visit, ideally near an entrance
- staff must escort visitors to and from the visit, and monitor the visit
- visitors must be screened by the facility and they must practice proper hygiene
- the area must be cleaned before and after each visit

Gatherings (new)

- residents and staff can gather in groups of 10 or less for dining, recreation or socializing without physical distancing
- groups should remain consistent and visitors cannot join

Licensed hair salons (new)

- licensed hair salons that operate within a long-term care home may reopen to residents only
- the salon must follow the guidelines set by the Cosmetology Association of Nova Scotia and submit a safety plan to the facility within which it is located

- a list of every resident who visited the salon, and when, must be maintained

Off-site bus trips (new)

- facilities will be permitted to resume off-site bus trips for groups of up to 10 people (including residents, staff and driver)
- the trips must be for sightseeing only; residents and staff cannot disembark the bus
- bus drivers must be screened using the same protocols as visitors to a facility and contact between the driver and residents/staff should be limited
- the bus must be cleaned before and after use
- facilities are expected to group the same residents together each time and maintain consistent staff, where possible

In all situations above, no one exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19 may participate. Anyone experiencing symptoms should not visit a long-term care home (or any public space) and should contact 811 to arrange testing.

Why are you doing this now?

Very early in the pandemic, we implemented the first restrictions on visitors to long-term care homes. On March 15, all visitation was stopped. This was done to protect the physical health of residents, but we know it's had a toll on their mental and social well-being. With new cases remaining low, we can now loosen some of the restrictions and bring some normalcy back into the lives of long-term care residents.

Is it safe?

It's important to note that we're easing, not eliminating, restrictions. Visitors will be required to wear masks and have their visits under certain conditions, including scheduling the visits and continuing to limit how many can attend. Everyone must practice physical distancing and good hygiene. Residents need more social interaction, and this will help.

What are the current rules?

On June 15, restrictions were eased to allow outdoor visits by appointment with up to 2 visitors per resident. We've received good feedback on this, but it's time for more opportunities for resident to interact with others. The new rules outlined above will take effect July 22.

Do indoor visits pose more risk?

Not every resident can go outdoors. Indoor visits will be done with strict rules in place, including

- up to three people designated for these visits and one at a time
- visitors must be screened
- homes must designate a location in the facility
- everyone must wear a mask and practice physical distancing (except for a brief hug) and good hygiene
- visits must be pre-scheduled
- staff must escort visitors to and from the visit and remain in the room
- the space must be cleaned before and after each visit

Will volunteers be permitted back into facilities?

Not at this time.

Do homes have to implement these changes?

It is at the discretion of each facility whether they'll implement these changes. To accommodate some of these changes safely, appropriate space both indoors and outdoors is required. While we encourage each facility to do what they can, we recognize some may have limitations. Those who want more time to plan can implement any of these changes on a future date. We ask everyone to please be patient while homes do their best to ensure any activities follow the rules and have the safety of residents as the top priority.

How many residents are in long-term care?

There are 133 licensed nursing home and residential care facilities in the province with almost 8,000 residents.

Does this apply to Department of Community Services facilities?

Adult Residential Centres and Regional Rehabilitation Centres licensed by the Department of Community Services will also implement indoor visits under the same guidelines.