

Toronto Region

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October 31, 2022

MEMORANDUM TO: Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services
(MCCSS) funded and/or licensed service providers

FROM: Sherri Rennie
Director, Toronto Region

RE: **MCCSS COVID-19 Fall Planning Reminders – October
31, 2022**

I would like to thank those who were able to join the COVID-19 Fall Planning Webinar for MCCSS service providers that was held on Monday, October 24, 2022. More than 600 people attended the webinar, which speaks to your ongoing commitment to keep vulnerable people supported, and to ensure that staff, and our communities remain healthy and safe.

If you were unable to join the webinar, I am writing to re-iterate key information related to COVID-19 fall planning.

The fall and winter seasons typically see a resurgence of respiratory illnesses, and we know from our experience over the last two years that active case counts of COVID-19 increase. We can also anticipate potentially higher case counts of other illnesses including influenza. Fall planning can help you and your teams reduce the risks for COVID-19, flu and other illness over the next several months.

- Continue to strongly encourage the people you support and staff to get vaccinated and receive their booster dose(s) as soon as they are eligible, and also encourage them to get their annual flu shot.

- Keep in mind that people who are at a higher risk of developing severe symptoms can access antiviral treatments.
- Continue following and encouraging practices such as masking, physical distancing, and good hand hygiene for residents and staff, both at home and in the community.
- Take measures to support increased ventilation and indoor air quality, which remain important to reduce the spread of COVID-19.
- Congregate living settings are recommended to develop and maintain:
 - outbreak preparedness plans; and
 - staffing contingency planning, including intentional efforts to collaborate across service providers at the community level.
- Continue the use of rapid antigen tests (RAT).
- Pay attention to any other areas of known/ assessed risk either at the organizational level or identified through regular engagement with the Ministry.
- We are reminding all residential sites to complete the vaccination survey by November 11, 2022.

Please note that PPE continues to be available through the Ministry of Public and Business Service Delivery (MPBSD) and the PPE Supply Portal (PSP). In addition, the COVID-19 Residential Relief Fund (CRRF) and COVID-19 Community Supports Fund (CCSF) are still available to service providers.

New: Service providers are strongly encouraged to inform their staff of a new learning opportunity, the Provincial Health Ontario’s [Infection Prevention and Control \(IPAC\) online learning page](#), and to consider how this program can be incorporated into onboarding and continuous learning policies and procedures. The course is designed for people who do not have formal health care training and provides a targeted learning experience that covers IPAC essentials. Participants will learn:

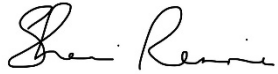
- how to conduct a risk assessment
- perform proper hand hygiene
- when and how to use personal protective equipment safely
- the basics of administrative and environmental infection control measures, and
- best practices for outbreak management.

Participants who successfully complete all seven modules of the course will receive a certificate of completion.

For questions or concerns related to any of these updates, please continue to reach out to your Program Supervisor and/or Ministry contact.

Placing agencies and/or agencies that contract with a third party for the provision of services are asked to please share relevant information with any unlicensed outside paid resources (OPRs) and/or third parties.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sherri Rennie".

Sherri Rennie
Director, Toronto Region

Appendix: October 2022 Detailed Key Updates

- Please continue to strongly encourage the people you support and staff to get vaccinated and receive their booster dose(s) as soon as they are eligible.
 - Most people under the age of 65 should receive their booster dose at the recommended six-month interval. However, one can choose to book their next appointment three months after their last dose.
 - As of October 17th, 2022, everyone aged 12 and over is eligible to get a bivalent COVID-19 booster dose if they have completed their primary COVID-19 vaccine series.
- It is also important to get an annual flu shot. Starting November 1, flu shots will be available through health care providers, public health units and in participating pharmacies, and may safely be given at the same time, or at any time before or after COVID-19 vaccine, for individuals aged five years and older.
 - Children between six months and under five years are recommended to wait 14 days before or after the administration of another vaccine before getting their COVID-19 vaccine. Find out more at ontario.ca/flu.
- People who are at a higher risk of developing severe symptoms can access antiviral treatments such as Paxlovid if they have COVID-19 symptoms. Learn more about [COVID-19 treatments](#) and review your eligibility by using [Ontario's antiviral screener tool](#).
 - Service providers may also continue to work with health care providers to have higher-risk residents pre-assessed to determine whether they would be eligible for treatment.
- No single intervention is perfect at preventing the spread of COVID-19. Masking, physical distancing, and good hand hygiene are important practices to continue at home and in the community.
 - The latest COVID-19 recommendations for congregate living settings can be found here: [COVID-19 Guidance: Long-Term Care Homes, Retirement Homes, and Other Congregate Living Settings for Public Health Units](#).
 - General COVID-19 public health advice can be found here: [Public health measures and advice | ontario.ca](#).
- As we once again move towards increased indoor activity, measures to support increased ventilation and indoor air quality remain important ways to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Service providers are reminded that:
 - Opening windows, for even a short amount of time, is an easy way to increase air circulation.
 - CO₂ monitors (which help detect areas with poor ventilation) are available for ordering to support improved air quality.

- Congregate living settings are recommended to develop Outbreak Preparedness Plans to support the operationalization of the recommendations outlined in the most recent [COVID-19 Guidance: Long-Term Care Homes, Retirement Homes, and Other Congregate Living Settings for Public Health Units](#).
 - This includes developing contingencies as appropriate to their settings,
 - Plans should include policies and procedures for caring for a symptomatic or COVID positive client/resident, including supporting on-site isolation and developing plans for isolation off-site, if needed.
 - Refer to [Public Health Ontario's \(PHO's\) COVID-19 Preparedness and Prevention in Congregate Living Settings Checklist](#).

- The most effective approaches to staffing contingency planning for all service providers include intentional efforts to collaborate across service providers at the community level. Service providers should be participating and contributing to community level plans, while being mindful of collective agreement entitlements/rights.
 - Appendix A: Management of Staffing in Highest Risk Settings of MOH's [Management of Cases and Contacts of COVID-19 in Ontario](#) outlines guidance for managing critical staffing shortages. It is the responsibility of the organization implementing the guidance to determine what early return to work option to use under their current circumstances and populations served.

- Rapid antigen test (RAT) screening requirements for **MCCSS-funded and/or licensed congregate living settings** (excluding youth justice direct operated facilities) are to continue the use of RATs in accordance with the [October 2022 Interim Direction](#).
 - Testing requirements for **adult developmental services day support programs** also remain unchanged.
 - RAT kits continue to be available to all service providers (including non-congregate living) through the Provincial Antigen Screening Program (PASP).
 - Organizations that are PASP participants in regions that have transitioned to the PPE Supply Portal may place separate orders for RATs due to temperature-controlled shipping requirements.

- Per the September 1st memo, MCCSS's phased transition of PPE distribution to the Ministry of Public and Business Service Delivery (MPBSD) and the PPE Supply Portal (PSP) continues.
 - If you have any questions about the transition, please contact the ministry's PPE team at MCCSSPPESupplies@ontario.ca.

- The COVID-19 Residential Relief Fund (CRRF) and COVID-19 Community Supports Fund (CCSF) continue to be available to support organizations to

respond to public health guidance and to help address exceptional support costs related to COVID-19 that a service provider is not able to manage within flexible use of their existing budget, or to mitigate risk through a service delivery model that reflects the hierarchy of control.

- As public health guidance is updated and evolves, agencies should be reviewing their non-outbreak, planned expenditures to ensure alignment with CRRF/CCSF eligibility.

Vaccination Survey due November 11, 2022

(For Residential Care Providers Only, Does Not Include Children's Treatment Centres, and other organizations serving children with special needs e.g. Healthy Child Development and Early Intervention Organizations)

By November 11, 2022, all residential sites are asked to report on the number of residents and/or Supported Independent Living clients who:

- have been fully vaccinated (2 doses)
- have received a dose of a COVID-19 vaccine in the last 6 months (between May 1, 2022 and October 31, 2022) AND/OR have had a COVID-19 infection in the last 6 months (between May 1, 2022 and October 31, 2022)

Please complete the survey by visiting: <https://ncv.microsoft.com/NAFvUBDly4>.

New: Infection Prevention and Control (IPAC) Training for Congregate Living Settings.

- The vital importance of IPAC in congregate living settings is one of the key lessons learned over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic. Everyone who works in a congregate living setting can play an important role in preventing the spread of infections among those they support and keeping their workplaces safe.
- MCCSS has been working with PHO on the updated IPAC Fundamentals learning program to incorporate the needs of our respective community-based settings. To ensure that staff who work in these settings have the IPAC knowledge they need to keep themselves, the people they support, and their co-workers safe from infectious diseases, PHO has developed a new online learning program: IPAC for Non-clinical Staff.
- We would like to thank our colleagues at PHO for working to reflect, as much as possible, congregate care settings within the modules. We appreciate their willingness to work with us and incorporate the advice we've received from sector representatives.
- The course, which is available now on PHO's [Infection Prevention and Control online learning page](#), is designed specifically for people who do not have formal health care training and provides a targeted learning experience that covers IPAC essentials. Participants will learn how to conduct a risk assessment, perform proper hand hygiene, when and how to use personal protective

equipment safely, the basics of administrative and environmental infection control measures, and best practices for outbreak management. Participants who successfully complete all seven modules of the course will receive a certificate of completion.

Service providers are strongly encouraged to make their staff aware of this learning program and consider how this program can be incorporated into your agency's on-boarding and continuous learning policies and procedures.

- We recognize that some agencies have developed their own internal IPAC training materials. While agencies are encouraged to leverage the PHO resources wherever possible, should an agency develop their own training, it is their responsibility to ensure the materials continue to be updated and reflect the best available advice, direction, and evidence available by ensuring materials produced are aligned with PHO guidance.