

Ministry Changes – Directives Revoked

Throughout the pandemic the government has issued directives that address masking, testing, vaccinations and visitor restrictions to ensure safety for patients, residents, clients, visitors, volunteers, staff, and physicians. This week the Ontario government's health ministries announced removal of key COVID-19 directives, transferring oversight for these matters directly to the health service provider.

Effective March 14, 2022, certain COVID directives impacting the health care system will be revoked. However, it has been noted that Health Care organizations are strongly encouraged to ensure COVID-19 vaccination policies remain in place. Dr. Kieran Moore, the Chief Medical Officer of Health, stated "Vaccinations will remain one of the cornerstone interventions for our ongoing protection against COVID-19".

Although the latest Omicron variant, while highly contagious, appears to have less serious outcomes, it is important to recognize that our region continues to experience high levels of community spread and that new variants continue to be monitored.

Riverside Health Care's primary responsibilities include ensuring the safety and protection of those we serve and our staff, volunteers and physicians. The requirement for all Riverside Health Care staff to receive their third booster is March 25, 2022. We have amended the requirement due date from March 14, 2022 to March 25, 2022 for long term care to align with our hospital and community sectors. This position is consistent with our partner hospitals across the region.

We continue to focus on ensuring a balance is achieved between safety and quality of life for our patients, residents and visitors. Please note the following Visitor/Caregiver changes that will go into effect March 14, 2022:

Long Term Care:

- fully vaccinated visitors/caregivers require rapid antigen testing (RAT) two times per week; and
- unvaccinated visitors/caregivers require a RAT prior to entering the Home.

Acute Care :

- fully vaccinated visitors/caregivers do not require any RAT; and
- unvaccinated visitors/caregivers require a RAT prior to entering the hospital.

Those returning from **any** travel will no longer be required to complete routine testing, unless instructed to do so as part of a quarantine order issued by Canada Border Services.



Recent announcements to the public regarding isolation requirements do not apply to High Risk settings such as hospitals or long term care homes. High risk settings are subject to unique restrictions such as 10 day isolation for COVID-19 positive staff and for those that are close contacts of a positive individual. Likewise, the recent announcement by the Ontario government to lift the mask mandate on March 21st is not applicable to health care settings. This means all of our Riverside Health Care sites and services will continue to respect our health care policies mandating continued use of masks by staff, volunteers, physicians, and visitors.

Today is the 2nd anniversary of the COVID-19 pandemic and no words can capture the impact it has had on our lives. As provincial governments across the country implement reopening plans and we return to a life that is similar to pre-pandemic times, I would ask that we take a moment to reflect on the many sacrifices those across the health care system have made to ensure the safety of Rainy River District residents. Thank You to all staff of Riverside Health Care and our health care partners for giving so selflessly to ensure the safety of each and every one of us.

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