

## Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services

# Re-Opening of Congregate Living Settings: Short-Stay Absences and Outings and Essential Overnight Absences

### A. Introduction

On April 23, 2020, the government released its [COVID-19 Action Plan for Vulnerable People](#). This included guidance on limiting non-essential visitors in congregate living settings to reduce exposure and prevent the spread of COVID-19. The action plan was followed with subsequent guidance for congregate living settings.

Within the context of Ontario's reopening and its response to the COVID-19 outbreak, this revised document builds on the previous guidelines by providing updated direction on Short-Stay Absences and Essential Overnight Absences.

As the government continues with re-opening the province it is important to recognize that people living in congregate living settings enjoy the same rights as all Ontarians. It is therefore important that MCCSS funded agencies and service providers recognize and respect residents' rights including their desire and willingness to participate in the life of their community while following current public health guidance.

As the outbreak evolves in Ontario, direction regarding visits and absences at congregate living settings will be adjusted as necessary, keeping the health, safety and emotional well-being of residents and staff at the forefront.

**Important note for Transfer Payment Recipients (TPRs) providing youth justice congregate care services.** The Ministry's Youth Justice Division continues to work with key stakeholders on operational guidance with respect to the safety, security and confidentiality of the youth we serve, their families, and employees with a goal of resuming non-essential reintegration leaves. Communication will be distributed to all TPRs providing open and secure youth justice services once reintegration leaves for non-essential purposes can resume.

### B. Requirements for Short-Stay Absences & Outings

The resumption of short-stay absences, outings and community engagement and participation is important to maintain the social, emotional well-being and quality of life of people residing in congregate living settings. Residents should be given equitable access to outings and community participation consistent with residents' preferences and within reasonable restrictions that safeguard both residents and staff.

These principles are consistent with efforts underway to support people and communities as the province re-opens, while balancing the need for continued protections to stop the spread of COVID-19.

For congregate living residents who wish to go outside of the home for a short stay absence or outing (e.g., outing with friends or family, school attendance as applicable, shopping, errands, appointments, etc.), the following requirements must be met:

- Residents must pass an active screening questionnaire that screens for signs and symptoms of and potential exposures to COVID-19 every time they re-enter the congregate living site, which is in addition to also being required to be screened twice daily. If a resident does not pass screening, the site will follow isolation policies.
- The resident performs proper hand hygiene upon exit and entry of congregate living site as well as maintains hand hygiene (e.g./ uses hand sanitizer regularly including upon entry/exit of buildings/spaces) while in the community and uses hand hygiene after touching objects or surfaces that could be touched by others or after touching others.
- The resident wears a face covering/mask (cloth mask is acceptable) when entering indoor spaces or when they are within 6 feet / 2 metres of others in outdoor spaces. In addition, the resident should be encouraged to adhere to physical distancing practices as much as possible as well as adhere to any current local public health unit advice related to local conditions and requirements.
- As much as possible, residents should avoid crowded indoor places, and interactions with multiple people. Masks should only be removed indoors to eat or drink, and then immediately put back on afterwards.
- Agencies should assist people in obtaining face coverings/masks to facilitate the use of the masks during the resident's short-stay absence.

For information on how to wear, remove and handle non-medical mask or face-coverings please refer to the following resources:

- [Public Health Ontario advice on non-medical masks/face coverings](#)
- Government of Ontario [website for Face Coverings and Face Masks](#)
- Health Canada: [How to wear a non-medical mask or face covering properly \(video\)](#)

**NOTE:** All children and young persons receiving residential care have a right to receive an education that corresponds to their aptitudes and ability, in a community setting wherever possible. With the return to school in September 2020, children's residential service providers are to engage with the children and youth in their care, placing agencies, school boards, and parents or guardians where applicable to discuss the options for children and youth to return to school. Specific guidance for the school setting has been provided by the Ministry of Education and School Boards.

## C. Essential Overnight Absences:

An essential overnight absence (e.g. to a family home) is one considered necessary to maintain the health, wellness and safety, or any applicable legal rights, of a resident. Agencies should take careful consideration to support residents' emotional well-being through overnight absences.

- A resident returning from an essential overnight absence must upon return, while in the congregate living setting, follow enhanced precautions for 14-days post essential overnight visit, including:
  - Upon return, pass an active screening questionnaire that screens for signs and symptoms of and potential exposures to COVID-19;
  - Only receive outdoor visitors during the 14 days;
  - Monitor for symptoms;
  - Avoid using common areas; however, if a common area cannot be avoided, the resident must use a face covering/mask;
  - Limit contact with other residents;
  - Only participate in group activities if physical distancing is maintained (i.e., a distance of 6 feet or 2 metres) and the use of a face covering/mask;
  - Practice proper hand hygiene by washing their hands often (using soap and water, or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer);
  - Adhere to respiratory etiquette; and,
  - Continue to follow appropriate physical distancing guidelines (i.e., maintaining a distance of 6 feet or 2 metres).
- Residents who are following the 14-day of enhanced precautions may leave their congregate living setting for short stay (non-overnight) absences/outings (e.g. go to school, go on walks and other activities of daily living) following the precautions outlined in Section B.

Leaving the residence for a short stay absence/outing will NOT reset the 14-day time period. However, another overnight stay during the same 14-day period will reset the 14-day period.

**NOTE:** The enhanced precautions for 14-days is not to be applied to an individual who has previously had a laboratory confirmed case of COVID-19 and have subsequently recovered. Testing/isolation following such absences should be done in consultation with the local public health unit, taking into consideration any symptoms at the time of return to the congregate care setting or new high-risk exposures.

## D. Timeline

The direction in this guidance will come into effect on August 28, 2020.