COVID-19 vaccine now mandatory for staff of long-term care homes

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The Ontario government has made vaccination against COVID-19 mandatory for all staff members at long-term care homes.

The government announced last Friday (Oct. 1), that all staff including in-home staff, support workers, students, and volunteers must be vaccinated by Nov. 15, unless they have a valid medical exemption. Those who are not fully vaccinated will not be allowed to work inside a long-term care home.

?We know that long-term care residents have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. As new variants continue to spread, we are seeing a growing number of outbreaks in long-term care homes where the risk to those most vulnerable remains high,? said Rod Phillips, Minister of Long-Term Care.

The province previously required unvaccinated staff members to undergo rapid antigen testing, and take educational courses on vaccine safety and effectiveness.

Phillips said the mandatory vaccination decision comes due to concerns with low vaccination rates in long-term care homes. He added that 367 of the 626 homes in Ontario have staff vaccination rates below 90 per cent, and 90 homes have a rate below 80 per cent.

According to vaccination rates published on Oct. 1, 89 per cent of staff at Shelburne Long Term Care have received two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine, while 81 per cent of staff at Dufferin Oaks are considered fully vaccinated.

The province last Friday said that homes will begin randomized testing of vaccinated staff to detected breakthrough cases. The ministry will be auditing the results.