

Ontario begins easing visitor restrictions for long-term care homes

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Ontario has begun to ease visiting restrictions at long-term care homes as public health indicators for COVID-19 continue to trend downward.

As of Feb. 7, the number of designated caregivers per residents has increased from two to four, while still being subject to a limit of two per resident at a time. Residents who have had at least three doses of a COVID-19 vaccine are also able to resume social day trips.

In late December, the provincial government implemented additional restrictions to long-term care homes, including a pause on general visits to homes, in response to the rising number of COVID-19 due to the Omicron variant.

Effective Feb. 21, general visits from individuals five years and older who have had at least two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine will be allowed to resume. Other restrictions eased including increasing the number of visitors at a time to three per resident, allowing for social day trips regardless of vaccinations status, and overnight social absences for residents with three vaccine doses.

According to the province, the return of general visitors to homes will also mean the resumption of adult day programs, entertainers, and external personal care services.

Social group activities will also be allowed, but with limits up to 10 individuals.

Brenda Wagner, administrator at Dufferin Oaks said with the easing of mandates, the local long-term care home is anticipating the return of general visitors.

"Dufferin Oaks has been fortunate to be greatly supported by our group of essential caregivers, who make up the majority of our daily visitors. Since there was minimal restriction imposed on essential caregivers, our residents continued to receive ongoing visits from their loved ones. We look forward to welcoming general visitors back as soon as we are able, to further support the emotional well-being of our residents," wrote Wagner in an email.

The final phase in easing restrictions at long-term care homes will occur on March 14, with general visits opening to those under five years old, visitor limits at a time rising to four, and social overnight absences regardless of vaccination status.