

What Happens During an Outbreak?

With all the media coverage about the impact of COVID-19 on long-term care homes in Canada and the U.S., you may be wondering: what happens in a peopleCare long-term care home if an outbreak occurs?

First, please be reassured that peopleCare is doing everything possible to keep COVID-19 out of our Homes. Our proactive approach puts new precautions in place, based on the best, most current information available to us, supplements Public Health and Ministry directives. It also supports our shared goal to create an iron ring of protection around our Homes and our vulnerable residents.

At the same time, we have diligently prepared for the possibility of an outbreak – including developing a comprehensive COVID-19 Outbreak Plan. Read on for details about the actions we take during an outbreak to keep families updated, care for ill and healthy residents, protect staff and prevent spread of COVID-19 in the Home to minimize any impact on our residents and staff.

Families are kept in the know

Along with the safety and wellbeing of their loved one, top of mind for most of our families during this pandemic is staying informed. We notify everyone as soon as possible when an outbreak is declared, getting the word out to families quickly through emails and recorded phone messages. Every family is contacted if their loved one has been exposed, is tested for COVID, or the test comes back positive. Families are welcome to call with questions, and we appreciate your patience if the Home experiences a high volume of calls with the news of an outbreak.

Our Plan kicks in

Currently, two or more lab-confirmed cases (resident, staff and/or visitor) within a 14-day period, that have an epidemiological link and where at least one person could have reasonably acquired their infection in the Home, means our Home goes into outbreak. As soon as that happens, our team begins working through a long list of actions geared to caring for ill residents and keeping the virus from spreading to healthy residents and staff, such as:

- Continuing to monitor healthy residents daily, with particular attention for signs of respiratory illness and twice-daily temperature checks
- Working with Public Health to investigate cases and stop the chain of transmission, e.g. by isolating residents who may have been exposed, and testing practices aimed at early detection of new cases.
- Caring for ill residents and healthy residents separately to minimize spread of the virus
- Putting programs on hold, and providing meals for residents in the comfort of their room

“The outbreak may be considered over when there are no new cases in residents/staff after 14 days from putting last case into isolation.” (Source: Ministry of Health COVID-19 Guidance for Long-Term Care Homes.)

Residents are the centre of our universe

Working with our Medical Directors, our skilled nursing staff is experienced in providing exceptional care and comfort measures for ill residents. Although there is no cure for COVID-19, we will use all available interventions to ease the symptoms – which include fever, cough and shortness of breath. The safest and most comfortable place for your loved one to receive care is in our Home and we will do everything in our power to provide every

resident with the care they need. Should a resident become palliative due to their illness, as always, our Director of Care and Medical Director will support the resident and their family every step of the way, including decisions around hospitalization and end-of-life care. Designated essential caregivers who pass active screening are present in the Home even during an outbreak. Family members of a resident who is very ill or dying are considered essential visitors and, if they wish to do so and can pass active screening, would be welcome to be with their loved one during his/her final hours.

PPE protects everyone

With great courage and compassion, our care teams put themselves on the line to care for ill residents and so we do everything we can to protect them. We have developed protocols and checklists, while also following the Ministry's guidance for staff safety during COVID-19 outbreaks. For example:

- Personal protective equipment (PPE) – including masks, gowns and gloves – is the shield that protects the health of our frontline teams and we have worked tirelessly to ensure we have adequate supplies for use in the event of an outbreak.
 - All staff are trained in how to properly take PPE on and off.
 - All staff put on PPE at the beginning of their shift, then follow our evidence-based PPE protocols, specific to whether they are working with ill or healthy residents.
- Hand-sanitizer and other hand-hygiene is always readily available throughout the Home.
- Staff meet regularly throughout the day about their work assignment and the health status of residents.
- We follow best practices on enhanced disinfection of frequently touched surfaces and equipment.
- Staff are limited to working only at their designated peopleCare Home.

It's all hands-on deck

During an outbreak, our teams are encouraged to work together in new ways to ensure care continues without interruption and we balance the needs of residents with the challenges of an outbreak.

- Our staff may be assigned to different areas of the Home than normal, or take on additional roles and responsibilities as they support one another and residents. We have identified backups for key roles in the event of staff illness or self-isolation.
- Our Medical Director and physician team will be available – either in person or via telehealth options.
- Active screening remains in place for everyone: including physicians, EMS, essential visitors and more.
- All healthy residents and staff will be tested for COVID-19 if they have just one symptom (fever, cough or shortness of breath).
- We may need to move residents to different rooms if it would reduce their exposure to the virus.
- We will implement alternatives – such as increase one-to-one programming – to support residents with cognitive issues, who may find outbreak protocols challenging.
- To minimize exposure and reduce spread, resident admissions/readmissions are not allowed.
- Supply deliveries are organized in new ways to ensure minimal contact with delivery personnel.

We are always here to support you

This pandemic is unlike anything any of us have faced before, and we want you to know that during an outbreak we are here to support our residents, families and staff.

If you have any questions or concerns about your loved one's care in a peopleCare Home, please call the Executive Director or Director of Care at any time.