

Updates for residents and families in long-term care homes and assisted living facilities

Issue 26 – Aug 10, 2021

We continue in our commitment to keep you informed about the changing information about COVID-19 and other information by producing this update for residents and families of long-term care homes and assisted living facilities once a month.

Changes to the staff masking policy in long-term care homes and assisted living facilities

- In Northern Health, starting August 5, 2021, staff members working in long-term care homes or assisted living facilities can choose to voluntarily disclose their COVID-19 vaccination status to their site manager if they would like to change their medical masking/eye protection requirements.
- Staff who voluntarily provide proof of full COVID-19 immunization to their manager (14 days after receiving a second dose of COVID-19 vaccine) will not be required to wear a medical mask or eye protection. Based on personal comfort levels, a staff member who is fully vaccinated can choose to continue to wear a medical mask and eye protection.
- Staff who are not fully vaccinated for COVID-19, or who choose not to voluntarily disclose their vaccination status to their manager, are required to continue wearing a medical mask at all times.
- Appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) remains in place for other situations where needed to protect staff from hazards in their work

Tips for coping during wildfire season

- If you're feeling stressed or anxious due to the news about evacuation alerts, and orders and the news about BC wildfires, you're not alone. Here are some things you can do:
 - **Prepare:** have a clear emergency plan and kit ready for your family, pets, and livestock. This can help you ease your mind and allow you to focus on other things. Examples of emergency plans are available online:
<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/emergency-preparedness-response-recovery/preparedbc/know-your-hazards/wildfires>
 - **Take care:** stress takes a toll on our physical and mental health. Eating well, exercising, and getting enough sleep lowers our stress and helps us cope.
 - **Ask for help:** talking to others – family, friends, a doctor, or counsellor – can help. Crisis lines are available to listen and help anytime, not just during a crisis.
 - **Help others:** reach out to the vulnerable. Assisting others can help us regain a sense of purpose and community as we confront changes together.
- **Crisis lines available 24/7:**
 - KUU-US Indigenous Line: 1-800-588-8717
 - Northern BC Crisis Line: 1-888-562-1214

Heat and air quality

- Preparation, awareness and self-care strategies are important ways to protect yourself and your family from heat and poor air quality.
- Exposure to hot weather can cause dehydration and other heat-related illnesses, such as heat exhaustion or heat stroke.
- Poor air quality from wildfire smoke typically causes irritation of the eyes, nose, and throat. It can cause more severe symptoms for people with underlying medical conditions, such as asthma,

chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), heart disease, and diabetes. Pregnant women, infants, and the elderly may also be at risk.

- **Heat precautions:**
 - Stay hydrated by regularly drinking a variety of fluids. Carry a water bottle to sip on throughout the day.
 - Wear light, loose-fitting clothing that lets sweat evaporate (e.g., cotton clothing, wicking fabrics).
 - Wear sunscreen and a hat when outdoors.
 - Check with your doctor or pharmacist to determine if you take medications that may affect your heat tolerance.
 - Use cooling towels or wristlets to cool off.
 - Monitor your hydration by observing urine colour; dark urine can indicate dehydration.
- **Air quality precautions:**
 - Avoid or reduce outside physical activity during poor air quality conditions and consider exercising indoors. Be aware of air quality conditions and trends. Time outdoor activity to take advantage of good air quality periods and days. If you have a respiratory or cardiac condition, it is recommended to avoid all demanding outdoor activity.
 - Use common sense and listen to your body – take a break and reduce activity if/when needed.
 - Keep hydrated to help your body deal with inflammation.
 - If you have a chronic condition, keep rescue medication on hand at all times and manage your symptoms following guidance provided by your doctor. Seek medical attention, if needed.
 - Keep external doors and windows closed as much as possible so that facility HVAC filtration systems can keep inside air cleaner.

For reliable information about COVID-19, we recommend:

- The Public Health Agency of Canada: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/coronavirus.html>
- The BC Centre for Disease Control: <http://www.bccdc.ca/Health-Info-Site/Documents/Coronavirus-FAQ-English.pdf>

By working together, we can protect your own health, the health of your loved ones, and the health of Northern Health staff members.

- Northern Health Virtual Primary and Community Care Clinic: **1-844-645-7811**
- BC Govt. COVID-19 Helpline: **1-888-COVID19** or **1-888-268-4319**

Previous updates for residents and families in long-term care homes and assisted living facilities:

- June 16, 2021: https://www.northernhealth.ca/sites/northern_health/files/services/home-community-care/documents/long-term-care-assisted-living-digest-24.pdf
- July 16, 2021: https://www.northernhealth.ca/sites/northern_health/files/services/home-community-care/documents/long-term-care-assisted-living-digest-25.pdf