



COVID-19 Newsletter April 2020

Mission

Strong People...Caring Communities...Our Future!

Vision

Provide a community that embraces excellence in person-centred care

We Value

Innovation, Collaboration, Accountability, Respect, Excellence

LTC and Services for Seniors Division news

Director's message

“We are like islands in the sea, separate on the surface but connected in the deep.”
— philosopher and psychologist William James (1842-1910)

Dear family members of residents in our four Regional Homes,

These are difficult times for everyone connected with long-term care; keeping informed and connected is a high priority for all of us.

This newsletter includes updates on long-term care changes and challenges, suggestions for coping with difficult realities, and answers to specific questions that you, as family members, have asked us.

As this situation is extremely fast-paced, anything written one day can be out-of-date the next (or even later that same day!), so our usual means of quickly informing you will continue. We attempt to keep everything as current as possible. You can always find [updates in the long-term care homes link](#) on the Durham Region website. Some of the material in this newsletter can be found on the site as well.

durham.ca/LTCUpdates

Laura MacDermaid, Director, Long-Term Care and Services for Seniors

If you require this information in an accessible format, please contact Mary Motschenbacher, 905-668-4113 ext. 2745.

Keeping in Touch

I know that the restrictions on visiting have been emotionally stressful for you and your loved ones. We have very much appreciated your understanding and co-operation during these trying times. We know you want to keep in touch with the nursing team and also with your loved one. Here are the available means for connecting:

Contacting the Home about your loved one:

You are invited to make one call per family per day to the registered staff to be updated on your loved one's medical status and general well-being. Note that only the registered staff can give out this information; it will not be given during a Skype call with the resident.

Contacting with your loved one directly:

You are also invited to make one call or email per family per day to request a phone or Skype call or window-visit with your loved one, facilitated by staff as they are able. Once you have emailed or your call goes to voicemail, please be patient as you wait for staff to get back to you. They want to accommodate everyone as often as they can.

Online Postcards:

You can send your loved one an online greeting card or "postcard". To do this, go to [durham.ca/LTCUpdates](https://apps.durham.ca/LTCUpdates). You'll be asked to fill in the resident's name, the specific Home and floor, your name, and your message—which can be up to 450 words. You can select the "[greeting card template](#)" which becomes the title of your message as well: **Happy Birthday, Happy Anniversary, Mother's Day, Father's Day, Thinking of You, Just Wanted to Say Hi**, and several others. Note that, just like an ordinary postcard, your message will be viewable by the staff processing the card. Staff will ensure your greeting is delivered. The [link is on the website](#), but here it is as well:

<https://apps.durham.ca/Applications/Social/LTCGreetingCards/>

Residents

Everyday life.

We recognize and empathize with the implications of the recent restrictions, particularly for residents who are used to going outside on their own or with friends and family members. This will be especially frustrating for many as the weather improves. Wherever and whenever possible, staff continue to offer programs and activities for residents based on their needs and interests, at all times in compliance with safety protocols.

- Music therapy either one-to-one or in small, well-spaced groups via Skype, Zoom, or Facetime, including quiet listening, sing-alongs, and Name That Tune games.
- Games including Bingo, 1:1 cards and cribbage, puzzles, and trivia quizzes.
- Activities such as colouring, folding, reading, watching television.
- Movie night, a travelling pub cart, and this past Easter we had a travelling Easter treat cart.

As always, the friendly rapport between residents and staff in all departments is source of emotional support and enjoyment for residents—and for staff!

Q. What can we send into the Home for our loved one? What can't we send?

A. Following guidance from public health experts regarding resident safety, we cannot accept donations of homemade food or flowers and there are restrictions on some other items. Please check in with the Home administration first.

If your loved one needs more toiletries, seasonal clothes, please ensure the items and clothes are freshly washed, wrapped and labeled and arrange with the front reception to drop off. These items will be wiped down with disinfecting wipes if possible or the items will be held in an area for 72 hours and then delivered to your loved one.

Q. What criteria are used to determine if a resident is COVID-19?

A. As directed by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, regardless of the outbreak status of the Homes, residents are assessed/screened twice a day. Staff monitor them for symptoms of fever and unusual respiratory symptoms such as cough, runny nose, nasal congestion, sore throat. If a change of status or symptoms develop, they are immediately placed in isolation, tested as per the direction of Public Health, and closely monitored. If the Home is in a COVID-19 outbreak, the staff work side-by-side with Public Health to follow best practices for the safety and comfort of all residents.

Q. What happens if my loved one tests positive for COVID-19?

A. When a resident tests positive for COVID-19, the home will ensure that the family is notified. Residents living in adjacent rooms to that person will also be tested. Further testing will be assessed, in collaboration with Public Health, using a risk-based approach based on exposures.

Regional long-term care homes are committed to providing exceptional care, following all Ministry regulations and Public Health Guidelines. The health, safety and well-being of those within our care are the highest priority.

Should your loved one test positive for COVID-19, in addition to maintaining our regular high level of care, employees are required to wear personal protective equipment (includes a surgical mask with a shield, a gown and gloves) when entering the rooms of any symptomatic residents. This gear is changed before and after any interaction with symptomatic residents.

Employees are diligent in the monitoring of these residents.

Plus, employees who work in a unit where someone tested positive will also be tested. As part of active screening for employee, they are also required to take their temperature twice daily and continue to self-monitor.

Q. What does it mean when a resident is “in isolation”?

A. Medical situations sometimes require that a resident be “in isolation”. This means that they are strongly encouraged to stay in their rooms at all times. Their meals are delivered to their room and assistance with eating is provided if necessary. Front door window-visits are not permitted, but phone and Skype calls can be facilitated. Staff wear appropriate PPE when entering the room and giving care and doff their PPE at the

doorway on their way out. We understand this is a difficult time for any resident and we try to make it as pleasant as possible for them.

Q. Can I discharge my loved one from the Home because of my concerns about COVID-19? If it doesn't work out, can they be re-admitted?

A. On March 26, the Region of Durham received notification that the section on Admissions and Discharges in the Long-Term Care Homes Act had been amended to allow residents to leave a long-term care home if they wish to do so due to COVID-19; and to have their return to the long-term care home expedited when they need to come back.

Before the resident leaves the Home, we are required to provide specific information, including information on care requirements and establish that the resident (or their substitute decision maker) assumes full responsibility for the care, safety and well-being of the resident. This would be done via phone. During the time the person is away, the bed will be available for occupancy by another person.

[For more details about returning to the Home](https://www.durham.ca/LTCUpdates), visit [durham.ca/LTCUpdates](https://www.durham.ca/LTCUpdates).

Q. What's happening for Mother's Day and Father's Day?

A. Each Home will celebrate these special days in creative ways and in keeping with the safety precautions. You are welcome to send cards to the Home and we will make sure they are given to the resident or posted on the unit for all to enjoy. We will attempt to facilitate phone calls or Skype calls with your loved one on those special days; please be patient as staff manage the extra requests we anticipate as best they can. Remember that the Home cannot accept flowers or homemade food.

Q. If my loved one passes away, can I pick up their belongings?

A. Environmental Services staff will collect all resident's personal belongs. Items that can be, will be wiped down with disinfecting wipes. All items will be bagged in clear plastic bags. Arrangements will be made between the Home and family to collect the belongs at a mutually agreed upon time outside the Home.

Staff

Staff screening: You might find it interesting—and reassuring—to learn more about the screening protocol all staff must undergo, from start to finish.

A staff member coming to work for his or her shift enters the building. A masked screener takes his or her temperature. If the staff's temperature is *not* within normal limits, he or she does not proceed further into the Home and instead receives instructions on the next steps to take. If the temperature *is* within normal limits, the screening continues.

The screener then asks a number of questions about the staff member's health, recent travel and contacts. If the staff member does *not* pass the screening, he or she does not proceed further into the Home and instead receives instructions on the next steps to take. Staff members who pass the screening questions sanitize their hands, put on (the technical term is "don") an approved mask, and proceed to report to their shift. If during

their shift they develop symptoms, they are to report immediately to their direct supervisor or registered staff.

At the end of their shift, they present themselves again to the screener to have their temperature taken before they leave the building. If their temperature is not within normal limits, they receive instructions on the next steps to take. If their temperature is normal, they take off (the technical term is “doff”) their masks, dispose of them in the designated bin, sanitize their hands, and leave the building, well-deserving of a time of leisure and rest before reporting again to work and beginning the process over again.

Staff and social distancing: Staff are required to comply with the six-foot rule wherever possible. This has required many challenging adjustments including making some changes to the way staff breaks are taken and changes to the break room itself.

Q. Are staff wearing PPE in all areas of the Home? Do they use the same masks over again the next day?

A. Wearing a mask is mandatory in our Long-Term Care homes. It must be the officially approved mask and it must be worn in all areas of the Home. We encourage staff to use a fresh mask every shift and it must be exchanged if it becomes soiled, wet or possibly contaminated. Masks aren’t particularly comfortable, but we know that they are fulfilling a higher purpose in keeping residents and staff safe.

Q. What about staff members who are employed in more than one facility?

A. As of March 19, staff employed at a Regional long-term care home are not permitted to work at more than one facility, as a further precaution to help reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19. The Province of Ontario has recently made this mandatory as well.

Q. How do staff manage social distancing when two of them are giving care to a resident?

A. Providing care involves close physical interaction, so social distancing has to be adjusted during care until staff make sure resident is safe and comfortable. Staff observe all required safety precautions before, during, and after care.

Q. What are other preventative measures we are taking to ensure the safety of residents and staff?

A. We have enhanced sanitation and cleaning measures throughout our homes. We continue to encourage all staff and residents to practice good hand hygiene and practice social distancing, when able.

We are continuing to ensure we have adequate supplies of PPE for the staff to use.

Q. What can we send to the home for staff to show our appreciation?

A. The best way you can show appreciation to staff is by sending a note of thanks to the Home. We will make sure it gets to the right place. Your words of appreciation and support mean the world to staff. The Home cannot accept flowers or homemade food. For any other gesture of appreciation, please check with Home Administration.

Let's stay connected

I hope that this newsletter, along with our regular means of communicating with you, helps assure you that you're getting accurate information and explanations from the Homes. Please let us know if you have any questions related to long-term care in this time of global pandemic and we'll do our best to get answers for you.

I also hope we can help you feel less isolated and more connected to us during this very difficult time of separation from loved ones. Our commitment remains to provide residents with the highest degree of professional, personalized care possible and, no matter what, to treat each individual with the utmost dignity, respect, and compassion. In this time of global crisis, acts of kindness and courage are happening all over the world; be assured that they are happening every day right here in our four Homes as well.

You may be physically distanced from us for a time but know that you are still a vital part of our long-term care family—we are all in this together.

The Regional Municipality of Durham
Social Services Department
Long-Term Care and Services for Seniors Division
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