



**SAFE VISITING POLICY  
DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

**Version 22: Updated March 15, 2022**



## **Summary of Key Changes for Safe Visiting Policy Version 22**

### **Effective March 16, 2022:**

- The Brenda Strafford Foundation is pausing the requirement for mandatory rapid testing of visitors entering the site, regardless of their COVID-19 immunization status. Voluntary rapid testing is still available to all visitors that choose to request a voluntary rapid test at screening on entry into the site.

## **Summary of Key Changes for Safe Visiting Policy Version 21**

### **Effective February 15, 2022:**

- As per current CMOH Order 06-2022, any visitor or volunteer that has had known close contact with a lab-confirmed or probable case of COVID-19 in the last **10 days** must not enter the site for **10 days** from the last day of exposure, regardless of their immunization status.
  - This represents a change from exposure within the last 14 days reduced to within the last 10 days, and the restriction on entering reduced from 14 days to 10 days also.

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## **BACKGROUND**

The Brenda Strafford Foundation (BSF) welcomes the gradual reintroduction of families and visitors returning into continuing care sites as an essential component of well-being and quality of life for residents – in a safe and controlled manner.

On July 1, 2021, the Government of Alberta lifted most of the provincial mandatory public health restrictions applicable to the general community. While restrictions lifted in the broader community, Chief Medical Officer of Health (CMOH) Orders applicable to continuing care operators still apply within continuing care environments.

On July 13, 2021, CMOH Order 36-2021 rescinded the Visitation Order (16-2021) for continuing care. As determined by the CMOH, risk to public health has substantively reduced with the increase in vaccine uptake, visiting restrictions are no longer needed and rescinding of the Order returns responsibility back to site operators to develop their own processes, if deemed necessary. BSF implemented changes in our Safe Visiting Policy effective immediately as of July 20, 2021.

On August 31, 2021, Alberta Health Services (AHS) announced they will now require all employees and contracted healthcare providers to be fully immunized for COVID-19. Contracted continuing care providers are included in this AHS governed requirement. This means BSF staff (and contractors) are now required to be fully immunized in compliance with this mandatory condition of employment for all healthcare workers in Alberta.

On September 15, 2021, the Government of Alberta declared a state of public health emergency and announced new mandatory public health measures to reduce the impacts of COVID-19 on the health care system in response to Alberta's 'Wave 4.' COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations continue to rise, largely in unvaccinated Albertans. New measures to protect the health care system, stop the spread, and increase vaccination rates came into effect throughout the province starting September 16.

On December 23, 2021, Alberta Health issued an updated CMOH Order for continuing care operators (CMOH Order 58-2021) in response to the rise of community transmission of the Omicron variant of COVID-19. The yet unknown challenges it will present to long-term care, licensed supportive living, and hospices, requires immediate action. BSF is introducing changes to our COVID-19 Safe Visiting Policy in response to the growing prevalence of COVID-19 in the community, in line with the current public health measures.

On February 9, 2022, the Government of Alberta announced that public health measures in the community will be lifted in 3 stages as the Omicron wave subsides and pressure on the health-care system eases. Alberta entered into Step 1 on February 9 and entered Phase 2 on March 1. Easing COVID-19 measures in continuing care is part of Step 3 of 'Alberta's path to return to normal'. All existing requirements remain in place in these settings, including continuous masking for staff and visitors.

## **PURPOSE**

The purpose of the BSF's 'Safe Visiting Policy during the COVID-19 Pandemic' is to protect the health and safety of residents and staff living and working in our sites, while ensuring residents

maintain access to the desired levels of support from persons that are essential in supporting them, and also maintain vital social interactions with family and loved ones.

### **BSF GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

- **Safety of self:** All individuals have a duty to minimize risk of infection to themselves by following all public health guidelines and required BSF policies and procedures.
- **Safety of others:** All individuals have a duty to minimize risk of transmission by following all public health guidelines and required BSF policies and procedures.
- **Responsive:** Recognition that site characteristics, risks and risk tolerance, and resident circumstances can change.
- **Risk informed:** Perceived or actual risk factors are recognized and considered alongside the needs and preferences of residents (at an individual and collective level).

### **PARAMETERS FOR VISITS**

#### **Visitation and Rapid Testing based on Immunization Status**

- Visitors that are not fully immunized are *strongly encouraged* to reconsider their need to attend to the resident onsite, indoors and in person (in line with the Chief Medical Officer of Health's recommendation issued October 19, 2021). Alternatives for in-person, onsite visits include outdoor visits (weather permitting), telephone calls and video calls.
- Effective March 16, 2022, BSF is pausing the requirement for mandatory rapid testing of visitors entering the site, regardless of their COVID-19 immunization status.
- Rapid testing is still available to all visitors that choose to request a voluntary rapid test at screening on entry into the site, and BSF continues to encourage visitors to participate in voluntary rapid testing on a frequent basis even though it is no longer a mandatory requirement.
- The visitor will be required to wait for the result of the rapid test before entering the site. Please allow an additional 15 minutes at screening to complete the rapid test if you choose to do so.
- Rapid testing is not recommended for anyone that has tested positive for COVID-19 within the past 21 days. Screeners (or those conducting rapid tests) will be verifying that a visitor is not within 21 days of completing their isolation period after a positive COVID-19 result.
- A voluntary rapid test can be performed on children aged 4 and under if the child is able to tolerate it and with parent/guardian consent. The following restrictions apply for all children aged 4 or under:
  - Pass the regular screening process
  - Continuously wear a mask indoors (if aged 2+ years)

#### **General Parameters for Indoor Visits**

- BSF's regular visiting hours are when reception is available typically between 7:00 a.m. and 8:00/9:00 p.m. (as applicable at each the site). Exceptions may be made to the site's regular visiting hours by request based on the resident's and family/visitor needs.
- All visiting persons entering the site must be actively screened at entry to the site. Active screening involves:

- Satisfactory COVID-19 screening using the Alberta Health Daily Checklist (as appropriate for children under 18; or for adults 18 and older).
- Screening may be completed electronically or on paper. This can be completed prior to arrival but must be confirmed by the screener prior to entry.
- Current restrictions for entry in accordance with Alberta Health mandatory screening include:
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- For anyone permitted to enter, the following information must be recorded for contact tracing purposes, for a minimum of 4 weeks, but not longer than required for the purposes of contact tracing: Name; Contact Information (phone number, email, etc.); Date/time of entry/exit.
- BSF will provide any necessary PPE for visitors (including masks) with instructions on usage, and full PPE will be provided for any visitors visiting a resident on contact/droplet isolation.
- Visitors must wear a surgical/procedure mask provided by BSF OR a well-fitted and unused KN95/N95 mask at all times in all indoor areas of the building (including in resident's rooms).
  - Any visitor bringing their own KN95/N95 mask must be wearing a new and unused mask that is opened from the packaging on entry to site.
  - Anyone unable to wear a mask due to an approved medical condition will require proof of a medical exception letter from an authorized health professional in accordance with Alberta Health requirements for mask exemptions. Anyone with a medical exemption must provide their proof of medical exemption to the Site Administrator for approval and must continue to present their proof of exemption upon each to the visit.
  - Exceptions may be made upon the approval of the Site Administrator when visiting residents with communication challenges (i.e. hearing concerns), where wearing a mask would inhibit communication. Mask may only be removed when inside a private space inside the building (i.e. resident's suite or private dining room) if the resident consents and a distance of two meters is maintained between the visitor and the resident at all times.
  - Children may wear own masks if the provided surgical/procedure masks provided do not fit the child.
  - Children under 2 years of age are not required to wear a mask (in line with public health requirements in the community).
  - Masks may be temporarily removed when seated in a private/designated area for the purpose of consuming food/beverage if the resident consents and a distance of two meters is maintained between the visitor(s) and the resident at all times. If the resident requires assistance with eating, the visitor must remain masked if coming within two

meters to assist the resident. Mask must be worn again as soon as the food/beverage is consumed and cannot remain unmasked for a prolonged period.

- Food may be shared during indoor visits inside a resident's room (sharing meals is not permitted in resident dining rooms or other common areas due to continuous mask requirement).
- Physical distancing is encouraged from other residents and their visitors, and from staff, where possible to the greatest extent possible.
- If a visiting person feels ill or develops any symptoms of COVID-19 while on site, they must leave their mask on, notify their site contact and immediately leave the site.

### **Parameters for Outdoor Visits**

- Any residents not on quarantine/isolation are able to participate in outdoor visits.
- On-site screening is not required when outdoor visitors do not require inside entry inside the building:
  - It is the responsibility of the visitor to understand their risk and adjust their behaviour accordingly to determine if they are safe to visit (i.e. not required to self-isolate due to illness or travel quarantine requirements).
- Food may be shared during outdoor visits.
- There are no limits on a resident's ability to visit outdoors beyond the property (e.g. on Community Walks) following the site's standard procedures for leaving the site premises.

### **EXTENDED ON-SITE VISITS & OVERNIGHT STAYS**

- Visitors will be required follow all regular site protocols for any requests to facilitate extended on-site visits/overnight stays to ensure a safe overnight visit within a site.

### **VISITING PETS**

- All regular BSF Pet Policy guidelines apply including providing the site with the pet's current immunization records (contact Therapeutic Recreation for more details).

### **BRINGING ITEMS, GIFTS AND FOOD ON SITE**

- All visitors are permitted to bring items, gifts and food for residents.
- Items brought into the site are to be cleaned/disinfected upon entry in the screening area.
- Food/beverages brought into the site by visitors may be consumed with residents during indoor visits in a resident's room or during outdoor visits.

### **LAUNDRY**

- All visitors are permitted to commence doing resident's personal laundry if desired by the resident/legal agent. Regular site operating practices apply for resident's laundry.
- During any times when visitation may be restricted (i.e. if directed by MOH during an escalating outbreak), resident's personal laundry will automatically be done by BSF on site until such time the visitation restriction is lifted.

### **OFFSITE OUTINGS**

- All residents who are not required to quarantine/isolate residents may leave the site on Outings based on their personal needs and risk tolerance.
  - All residents and families are strongly encouraged to assess their need for residents to attend offsite outings. While there is no restriction on outings for residents that are not required to quarantine/isolate, *BS strongly recommends* that all residents limit outings for essential reasons only (e.g., medical appointments other essential appointments/services that cannot be completed virtually), and do not leave the site to participate in social gatherings at this time.
- Residents must follow the site's standard social leave procedures for outings including sign-out and sign-in upon exit and re-entry to the site.
- Residents who leave the site premises for any outing are no longer required to undergo screening upon their re-entry to the site (except for compliance with CMOH Orders for 'Management of Residents Admissions/Return from other Health Settings' if returning from hospital or any CMOH Order in effect as relevant at the time).
- Should a resident choose to participate in an offsite outing, it is the resident's and their family's or visitor's responsibility to:
  - Understand and follow all mandatory public health measures if applicable in the community
  - Follow masking guidelines in places where applicable
  - Maintain good hand hygiene
  - Follow recommended safe transportation guidelines
- Effective starting on December 25, 2021, residents returning from an absence of greater than 24 hours (regardless of immunization status) are required to:
  - Wear a surgical/procedure mask for 14 days while in common areas of the site except when eating and drinking
  - Actively screen for symptoms daily
  - Rapid test on days 1, 3 and 7 post-return to site

## **RECOMMENDED GUIDELINES FOR SAFE PHYSICAL TOUCH & SAFE TRANSPORTATION**

### **Safe Physical Touch**

- The risk of transmission of COVID-19 increases with close proximity. Residents and their visitors may choose to include physical touch (such as hugging and holding hands) during their visits based on their own risk assessment and risk tolerance.
- Hand hygiene (hand washing and/or use of alcohol-based hand sanitizer) is strongly encouraged both before and after direct physical contact.
- Visitors must stop close contact with the resident and inform staff immediately for further direction if they become symptomatic during the visit.
- If resident is isolated due to symptoms of COVID-19, BSF will ensure that the visitors have the required PPE and are trained in the appropriate use of PPE.

### **Safe Transportation**

- Any transportation should be done as safely as possible. Residents, families and visitors are responsible for contributing both to their own safety and to the safety of the other residents and staff at the site to which the resident will return.
- For transportation within private vehicles (e.g., if resident drives self or when a visitor or family member picks up a resident) the resident or visitor/family member should ensure that the vehicle has been cleaned and disinfected prior to the resident entering, with focus on high touch surfaces (e.g., handles, steering wheel, window controls, armrests, seat belts, etc.).
- Public Transit (including city busses, LRT, handi-bus, etc.):
  - Follow guidelines set out by municipal transit operators to maintain safety.
  - Maintain safe physical distancing.
  - Wear a mask.
  - Frequently use hand sanitizer and especially after having contact with high touch surfaces (e.g., armrests, doors and railings, handles, etc.).
  - Refer to the Government of Alberta's [physical distancing tips for public transportation](#).

## **RESTRICTED ACCESS**

- Temporary limitations on visitors may still occur in situations where the threat of COVID-19 is imminent and in situations where a risk tolerance assessment indicates increased/high risk of exposure to COVID-19.
- Upon confirmation of an outbreak, Alberta Health Services Medical Officer of Health (or designate) leading the outbreak response will direct any necessary restrictions to visiting persons.
- BSF reserves the right under any high-risk assessment (i.e. due to high rates of community prevalence, CMOH recommendations or other public health measures, or any other factor that may limit our ability as an operator to safely accommodate visitation) to implement further restrictions that are deemed necessary to protect the health and safety of residents, staff, families and visitors to our sites. Any additional restrictions on access would be communicated to residents, families, visitors and staff as needed and would be monitored on an ongoing basis.

## **NON-COMPLIANCE AND DISPUTE RESOLUTION**

### **Non-Compliance**

- Any occurrence of non-compliance or unsafe visitation (including non-compliance of PPE, not following instructions from staff, or abuse towards staff) will be subject to safety incident reporting and investigation.
- Non-compliance may result in re-education or restrictions for visitors.
- Residents in shared semi-private rooms who are required to quarantine/isolate due to reasons related to non-compliance and exposure to risk may also impose a mandatory quarantine/isolation on their roommate.
- Restrictions will be evaluated after no more than 14 days.
- Administrator or designate may refuse entry if there is reason to believe an individual is not abiding by the Safe Visitation policies.

### **Disputes and Concerns Resolution**

- BSF will document all disputes related to site process as per existing concern/complaints processes under the Accommodation Standards and/or Continuing Care Health Service Standards (where relevant).
- BSF is committed to working with residents, designated family/support persons and visitors to address any concerns or disputes with respect, compassion and fairness.
- Should you have any disputes or concerns, the following processes are available to resolve your concerns:
  1. In the first instance, contact the direct care team at the site to ideally resolve any disputes/concerns.
  2. If not resolved, escalate the dispute/concern to the site Administrator.
  3. If not resolved, or at any time an alternative internal method of resolving the dispute/concern is preferred, contact the BSF Quality and Innovation team (Online form at: [www.thebsf.ca/contact/online-feedback.html](http://www.thebsf.ca/contact/online-feedback.html)) and a team member along with a social worker from a BSF site that is not appealing will review the dispute/concern.
  4. If not resolved, escalate the dispute/concern to the Chief Operating Officer.
  5. If not resolved, escalate the dispute/concern to the President and Chief Executive Officer.
  6. Should the concern still be unresolved after speaking with the operator and an executive of the organization/agency, Alberta Health Accommodation Standards and Licencing or Alberta Health Services AHS Patient Relations (only for designated supportive living or long-term care) may be contacted for support.
  7. If you have serious concerns that you have not been able to resolve with the site (or aren't comfortable discussing), contact ASAL@gov.ab.ca.

**ONGOING REVIEW AND EVALUATION:**

- This policy is to be reviewed on an ongoing and as needed basis
- Any changes to the policy will be communicated to residents, designated family/support persons and visitors as required.
- Residents, families and staff may propose amendments to this policy by contacting BSF Management or the Site Administrator as required.