

Visiting in long-term care during COVID-19

Before the visit

Background

The last few months have been challenging for all who live and work in long-term care and assisted living. In July, the Ministry of Health released guidelines for care homes to reopen visitation for residents with the requirement that care homes also submit their safe visitation plan.

What can I expect?

As there will be some variation in visiting procedures between care homes, you can expect your care home to send you a communication outlining their procedures for visitation and precautions they are taking. What you can expect in all care homes:

- All visits must be booked in advance with the care home. This may be by phone or online – your care home will let you know how to arrange these visits.
- At this time, only one designated visitor is allowed for social visits.
- Wash your hands often and avoid visiting if you or the person you are visiting are showing any signs of illness.
- Bring a mask and expect to wear one during your visit.
- You will have a time limit for your visit to allow staff to accommodate visitors for all residents.
- If there is an active outbreak at COVID-19 at the residence, visitation will be suspended immediately.

For more information about social visiting guidelines, see the BC Centre for Disease Control's [infographic](#) or [guidelines](#) document, which are both available on the BCCDC [website](#).

As the COVID-19 situation evolves, these guidelines will continue to be reassessed and may change.

Five questions to ask before your visit

1. Are there any restrictions to what I can bring to my social visit? For example, disposable food containers or other items that can easily be cleaned, such as letters or cards.
2. What number can I call if I need to reschedule?
3. How far in advance will I be able to schedule my visit?
4. How much time will I have with the person I am visiting?
5. Can I hug or touch my person? What should I do if my person hugs or touches me?

Consider the perspective of the person living with dementia

- The limitations to visitation in long-term care means that a person living with dementia may not understand why you could not visit them over the past few months and may feel confused, angry, or frustrated by your visit.
- The person may not understand why you are wearing a mask and become anxious or disoriented. You may also experience greater troubles communicating than before restrictions were put in place.
- The person may tire quickly or not be able to maintain conversation for the visit duration.

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Keep in mind:

People living with dementia are highly perceptive of emotions, and any feelings of fear or anxiety you have may indirectly transfer over to the person you are visiting. If you find your emotions become challenging during your visit, excuse yourself – if possible - and allow yourself time to pause and regroup so you can be fully present in your visit with the person.

Coping with the emotion

Seeing your family member again after months of being physically apart can be strange, even painful. It can be a reminder that things have changed and you may be feeling uncertain about how long these changes will last, or if there will ever be a return to the visits you had with your family member before the COVID-19 situation. You may experience a variety of feelings when you first see your family member after months of being apart:

- **Shock** at any changes to their appearance or health (such as weight or mental health). Keep in mind, appearance does not always reflect the level of care being received. For example, a person's hair may appear unkempt because of limited access to hair stylists before restrictions to visitation were reassessed. It can be tempting to blame care staff during your visit, however, if you are concerned with the care the person has received, take some time to reflect on your concerns and write down your observations. The emotion of seeing your person again may make it difficult to think logically about the situation.
- **Anxiety or worry** over the unknowns. You could

feel anxious about the person's physical condition or their feelings over your absence when not understanding why it occurred. Depending on where the person is along the dementia journey, you may feel anxious about whether they recognize you.

- **Guilt** over their being in care. Remember that the decision to move a person into long-term care is not one that was taken lightly. There was a reason that decision was made. Each family's situation is as unique as the experience of the dementia journey. Perhaps you are feeling powerless because things are happening, and you are not able to step in and support or help your family member when they need it. You are left with the feeling of being torn between being there for the person and keeping them safe.
- **Sadness and grief** over the restrictions to visitation that are still in place. You may be grieving the loss of time with your family member or feeling anticipatory grief over the loss of time you know could occur in the future.
- **Anger or frustration** over the situation you are both in and the restrictions still in place. You may wish for things to return to normal so you can visit your family member as you did before the visiting restrictions were put into place.
- **Relief** that you can see your family member in person again, in any capacity.

Additional resource:

["Personal protective equipment for family caregivers" training video](#) (Ottawa Hospital)