

October 25, 2022

To Acute Care, Long-Term Care, Retirement Homes and Congregate Care Leaders in Simcoe Muskoka:

Re: Continuation of Workplace COVID-19 Vaccination Policies

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your outstanding response to the COVID-19 pandemic for almost three years. The practices, policies and employee supports that you have put in place to help control the spread of COVID-19 within the acute care, long-term care, retirement home and congregate setting sectors have made a substantial impact on saving lives.

COVID-19 transmission will likely fluctuate within Simcoe Muskoka and across the province as public health measures adjust over time. With the seasonality of the virus and ongoing emergence of new variants, we must continue to protect the most vulnerable members within our communities. To help reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission, workplace vaccination policies have been an important measure that employers in health care have employed and should continue, together with other public health measures such as COVID-19 screening, physical distancing, masking, hand hygiene, and good ventilation. As such, many of you would have developed COVID-19 vaccination policies in response to provincial mandates in the fall of 2021. Although these mandates have been lifted, the Chief Medical Officer of Health (CMOH) for Ontario continues to cite the importance of maintaining COVID-19 vaccination policies, at the discretion of individual facilities. Vaccination will remain a very important defense against COVID-19. Continuity of operations within your sectors have been challenging at various times throughout the pandemic and vaccination policies help to ensure operations continue as well as contribute to a safer working environment.

Patients and residents in acute care, long-term care, retirement homes and other congregate settings are vulnerable due to transmission in congregate environments, along with being at greater risk of severe illness due to reduced immunity caused by advancing age, pre-existing health conditions or medical treatments. COVID-19 and influenza vaccination policies remain the best strategy for employers to protect staff and residents from severe illness.

Each wave and emergence of new COVID-19 variants has broadened our understanding of vaccines and their protection. During the Delta wave, two doses of COVID-19 vaccine provided adequate protection. However, during and since the Omicron wave, additional doses (including those of updated vaccines) have been necessary to achieve optimal protection from disease acquisition and transmission, as well as severe illness, and to boost waning immunity.

Employers are encouraged to develop and maintain COVID-19 vaccine policies in consultation with your legal counsel and update them as new evidence and recommendations on vaccination become available. The Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit has developed an [advisory document](#) to assist employers with maintaining these COVID-19 vaccination policies. The document indicates that the highest risk workplaces are those that serve clients at risk for severe disease, including health care

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settings and congregate living settings (ie. long-term care homes, retirement homes, group homes, shelters, etc.). In these settings, vaccination policies are strongly recommended. The document also recommends that policies incorporate all currently eligible doses, which is a primary series plus a booster dose for the general population aged 12 years and up. Also posted is a copy of the [COVID-19 Vaccination Policy](#) for the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit provided as information.

All settings are encouraged to continue vaccination education for residents/patients, staff and volunteers and reduce barriers to accessing vaccine both in the community and supporting on-site vaccination clinics.

Thank you again for your ongoing support as we continue to manage the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sincerely,

ORIGINAL Signed By:

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Medical Officer of Health

CG:cm

cc: Central Region of Ontario