MEMO

Date: December 17, 2020

To: SDO Long Term Care Leadership, Personal Care Home Operators and Staff

From: Dr. Brent Roussin, Chief Provincial Public Health Officer
       Lanette Siragusa, Chief Nursing Officer, Shared Health

Re: COVID-19 Asymptomatic Pilot Project in PCH

Earlier this year, sentinel, asymptomatic testing was offered across Manitoba to learn more about COVID-19 and about its spread. With increased transmission, we have prioritized testing across the province for Manitobans with symptoms of COVID-19. At the same time, targeted asymptomatic testing has continued throughout Manitoba’s overall COVID-19 response, including within long term care facilities for individuals who have been exposed or potentially exposed to a positive case of COVID-19.

With increasing access and availability of rapid testing, work has been ongoing to identify how and where rapid testing should be prioritized and deployed, including within long term care.

To support these efforts, a pilot project is being launched to introduce asymptomatic surveillance testing for staff in three personal care homes.

Asymptomatic Surveillance Testing Pilot Project

- Three Manitoba PCHs will participate in the pilot project. They include: Deer Lodge Centre (Winnipeg), Donwood Manor (Winnipeg) and Country Meadows Personal Care Home (Neepawa).
- The pilot project will test staff showing no symptoms of COVID-19 and with no known exposure to the virus.
- Staff of facilities involved in the pilot project will participate on a voluntary basis and will be tested once per week, while asymptomatic.
- The pilot project will use the Abbott Panbio COVID-19 rapid antigen test which provides a result in approximately 20 minutes.
- Staff that test positive will be considered “probable positive” and will be required to isolate pending confirmation of the results by a laboratory test. Public health will be notified of the probable positive and contact tracing will begin immediately.
- If the test is confirmed positive, the staff member will follow the directions of public health and occupational health services or designate until they are cleared to return to work.

It is important to note that testing is only one component of the outbreak response. Test results represent only a snapshot in time and negative test results do not eliminate the need for all the other preventive measures, as a person could become positive following a test.
The pilot project will assess training and deployment processes and the effectiveness of the new rapid testing equipment. While the initial availability of this rapid testing is limited to the three participating PCHs, once the results of the pilot are known, it is expected the project will be expanded to other licensed personal care homes in the weeks ahead.

**Efforts to Protect PCH Residents and Staff**

Within Manitoba’s personal care homes, we know there are increased questions from families about our approach to prevent, identify and isolate COVID-19 within our facilities. This includes requests for broad-based asymptomatic testing of staff and residents as outbreaks are declared in PCHs across the province.

Please note the following information related to COVID-19 screening, testing and isolation in PCH.

- Testing is prioritized for symptomatic residents and staff within a PCH as well as those who have had contact with a COVID-19 positive individual. In these circumstances, close contacts of a positive case are the first priority for testing, regardless of whether they have symptoms or not.
- In larger outbreak situations, more widespread testing of residents and/or staff may occur following consultation with Infection Prevention and Control and Public Health.
- Screening staff and residents for exposure and symptoms is another important tool to prevent transmission of this virus. Prompt isolation of symptomatic residents and or staff, appropriate training and use of personal protective equipment, and measures to reduce close contact as much as possible within the facility are also imperative to protect our residents, staff and reduce the likelihood of transmission.

Attached, you will find a letter to residents and families that shares more detail about the management of outbreaks in personal care homes as well as a Frequently Asked Questions document to support your facility in responding to common questions from staff and to support conversations with families.

We know that these past few weeks have been challenging for our health system as a whole and particularly for those areas where residents, patients or staff have been confirmed to have COVID-19. Please continue to reassure families that we are doing everything we can to keep their loved ones and our staff safe.

Thank you for the work you are doing to keep some of our most vulnerable Manitobans safe.