

SUBJECT: Work Self-Isolation in Highest-Risk Settings
Date: January 6, 2022
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To: Hospitals, Emergency Medical Services, Long-Term Care Homes, Retirement Homes, Congregate Settings, Health Care Providers
From: Dr. Nicola Mercer, Medical Officer of Health & CEO

- **Highest-risk settings such as health care and congregate living settings are experiencing high levels of staff absence due to illness or isolation requirements.**
- **In exceptional circumstances, workers who should be isolating because they are COVID-19 high-risk contacts or cases, may return to work using work self-isolation (WSI).**
- **Please read the [COVID-19 Integrated Testing & Case, Contact and Outbreak Management Interim Guidance: Omicron Surge](#)¹ for details on WSI guidance.**

In exceptional situations where care delivery would be severely compromised without additional staffing, it may be appropriate to have staff who are COVID-19 high-risk contacts or cases return to work early using work self-isolation (WSI). Ontario's [COVID-19 Integrated Testing & Case, Contact and Outbreak Management Interim Guidance: Omicron Surge](#)¹ provides details on this process.

Highest-risk settings

Highest-risk settings where WSI may be appropriate include:

- Hospitals, including complex continuing care facilities and acute care facilities;
- Emergency medical services (EMS);
- Health care settings that provide care to immunocompromised patients/clients;
- Long-term care homes and retirement homes; and
- Other high-risk congregate living facilities including group homes, shelters, hospices, settings housing temporary foreign workers, and correctional facilities.

WSI for staff who are cases

- Cases who are **symptomatic**, must self-isolate for 10 days.
- Cases who remain **asymptomatic** and are **fully vaccinated**, should also self-isolate for 10 days but may return to work on WSI ideally beginning on day seven after two negative rapid antigen tests at least 24 hours apart (i.e., day six and seven)
- Health care workers must wear fit-tested, seal-checked N95 respirators at all times during work. Staff working alongside health care workers must also wear fit tested N95 respirators at all times.
- Non-health care workers must wear a well-fitted medical mask or KN95 mask (if available). Staff working together must maintain physical distancing at all times and preferably wear a well-fitted medical mask or KN95 mask (if available).
- Must work at only one health care or congregate living setting during the period of WSI.

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- Must be actively screened prior to each shift.
- Must maximize physical distancing wherever possible and practice meticulous hand hygiene.
- Must not eat meals in a shared space (e.g., lunchroom) with other staff and, where possible, should avoid carpooling with other staff.
- Where possible, should avoid working with immunocompromised individuals.
- Must adhere to self-isolation outside of the workplace in accordance with public health requirements.²

WSI for staff who are high-risk contacts

- Must remain **asymptomatic** and be **fully vaccinated**.
- Must adhere to testing requirements for work self-isolation provided in Table 1, page 17 of the [Ontario Ministry of Health Guidance](#)¹.
- Must work at only one health care or congregate living setting during the period of WSI.
- Must be actively screened prior to each shift.
- Must maximize physical distancing wherever possible and practice meticulous hand hygiene.
- Must not eat meals in a shared space (e.g., lunchroom) with other staff and, where possible, should avoid carpooling with other staff.
- Where possible, should avoid working with immunocompromised individuals.
- Must adhere to self-isolation outside of the workplace in accordance with public health requirements.²

Please review the [Ontario Ministry of Health Guidance](#)¹ in detail for information about how to operationalize WSI as it applies to your staff.

References:

1. Ministry of Health. COVID-19 Integrated Testing & Case, Contact and Outbreak Management Interim Guidance: Omicron Surge, December 20, 2021. Available at: https://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/docs/contact_mgmt/management_cases_contacts_omicron.pdf
2. How to self-isolate while working. Recommendations for healthcare workers. September 17, 2021. Available at: <https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/ncov/ipac/ipac-covid-19-work-self-isolation.pdf?la=en>

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