

COVID-19: UPDATE ON OUR SERVICES OPTIONS NORTHWEST

Service Update #25, April 25, 2023

OPTIONS NORTHWEST continues to alter services to protect public health and safety amid COVID-19.

For COVID-19 binders and please post in a prominent place in the homes.

The health and safety of the people we support, and our employees, remain our priority as we continue to monitor the COVID-19 situation and find the best and safest way to provide services.

Overview of recent orders.....

Based on assessed level of risk to the health and safety of persons served and/or employees, OPTIONS NORTHWEST reserves the right to introduce heightened pandemic precautions (beyond the guidelines provided by MCCSS, Public Health, and other government and health authorities), and/or to temporarily pause or revert to an earlier stage in provincial re-opening guidelines, and to apply either approach across one or more operating areas, or to apply in a site-specific manner.

Like all Ontarians, we are following advice from local, provincial, and national health authorities to help stop the spread of the disease. OPTIONS NORTHWEST is continuing with the following to mitigate risk:

- OPTIONS NORTHWEST administrative sites will now be open to the general public during our regular hours of operation from 8am to 12:00 and 1:00 to 4:00
- Effective January 5, 2022, Scheduled and unsupervised visits will resume with the following procedures in place:
 - ~~Active screening of a visitor upon arrival, with policies and protocols in place to admit entry to those who pass the screening. (Limited to one visitor inside).~~
 - Visitors will be greeted and can gain entry now without needing to complete an active screening sheet or perform a recent rat test. Signs of symptoms should remain posted for ease of viewing for passive screening, as well as alcohol based hand sanitizer and masks at the entrance. Active screening of staff, students, volunteers, essential visitors, and general visitors is no longer required.
 - Proper respiratory etiquette and frequent hand hygiene.
 - Education on all required protocols will be provided by the site.
 - There is adequate staffing to implement visitation protocols and continue ongoing operations within the setting.
 - Environmental cleaning and disinfection of the visitation space(s) (including washrooms) will occur following recommended IPAC standards.
 - Where appropriate, the home is able to facilitate visits in a manner aligned with physical distancing protocols, including identifying a space(s) where visiting takes place and the areas that are off-limits (e.g., common areas, etc.) and the maximum capacity limit based on ability to physically distance within a designated space.
 - ~~Rapid Testing will be required prior to a visit when the tests are available.~~
 - If there is any type of illness within the home the visit will be rescheduled. Exceptions may be made to this for compassionate and/or palliative reasons.

- The Pandemic Team is reminding individuals who participate in the community to follow public health guidelines. Upon return to their home involving any type of absence the people we support no longer need to be actively screened unless they are showing signs of symptoms.
- Please note, while attending community activities and or supporting individuals in the community, staff continue to follow regular safety protocols and adhere to the use of PPE (based on their specific job requirement) throughout the duration of the activities. While in the community, people we support should be encouraged to wear masks and perform frequent hand hygiene throughout the activity. Employees should educate people on safe ways to participate in the community.
- MCCSS no longer requires that employees, visitors, or students require Rapid Antigen Testing (surveillance testing) to be completed three times a week when directly meeting with people we support.
- Vendors, Contractors, and other third-party supports will continue to be allowed to visit homes. Extra thought should be given to determine if the visit is necessary or can be delayed at times of increased numbers of COVID.
- ~~Recreational Activities (non-essential short-stay absences) for individuals outside of the Group Home, will be permitted:~~
 - ~~Brief physical contact with visitors:~~
 - ~~People we support and visitors, regardless of vaccination status, are permitted to engage in brief physical contact (e.g., a hug) during outdoor visits. This includes essential and non-essential visitors.~~
 - ~~Despite masking exemptions, where feasible, people we support are strongly encouraged to wear a surgical/procedure mask as well.~~
 - ~~Non-essential visitors must maintain physical distance (2 metres/6 feet) before and after physical contact.~~
 - ~~Rapid Antigen Testing will be completed upon return to the group home (when tests are available).~~
 - ~~Recreational Activities (Short Stay Absences):~~
 - ~~Individuals are permitted to leave the congregate living setting for a short stay (i.e., same-day) absence in the community.~~
 - ~~This will include recreational outings (activities for pleasure) in addition to essential absences (e.g., work, school, medical appointment, physical exercise). Employees will screen the individual when they return to the group home. If someone is ill in the home all housemates should avoid going out until they are cleared by public health.~~
 - ~~Effective January 14, 2022, individuals from Group Homes will be permitted to attend essential overnight visits with family.~~
 - ~~Upon return, the only restriction is that individuals that have been fully vaccinated must pass an active screening questionnaire that screens for signs and symptoms of any potential exposures to COVID-19. If a resident does not pass screening, the site will follow isolation policies.~~
 - ~~Upon return from an overnight visit, individuals who are not fully immunized must follow additional precautions until they receive a negative result on a COVID-19 test or 10 days has passed. If the resident does not pass screening, the site will follow isolation policies.~~
 - ~~**For overnight absences of 2 nights or less:** Rapid antigen screening should occur on day three and day seven from the day the resident left the setting.~~

- ~~For overnight absences of 3 nights or more: Rapid antigen screening should occur on the day of return (as part of active screening upon entry) and day four following their return.~~
 - ~~If the resident leaves for a subsequent overnight absence within those 7 days, a new 7-day period should be started when they return to the CLS.~~
 - ~~A resident who receives a positive result on a rapid antigen test should be given a medical (surgical/procedure) mask to wear, unless they are subject to a masking exemption (see masking section) and directed to a designated space away from other residents where they can self-isolate and wait for arrangements to be made for a confirmatory PCR test. (See COVID-19 Guidance for MCCSS funded and Licensed Congregate Living Settings November 2021 Caring for Individuals Who Need to Self-Isolate).~~
- All employees must wear a surgical/procedural mask while working with people we support. N 95 masks are also available which can be fit tested. The only exceptions to not wearing a mask is:
 - During employee mealtimes when the employee is eating and strictly maintaining social distancing or if they are supporting someone outdoors who is not immunocompromised and/or at a high risk of severe disease from COVID-19.
 - Face shield or goggles must be worn when providing direct care to individuals and social distancing cannot be maintained ex. during bathing, shaving, wound care, etc. Please ensure your PPE is stored properly in bags provided when you are eating and not left on counters, tables, or other surfaces. Audits will also be done as recommended by Public Health Unit.
 - If tolerated and can be done safely, people we support should be offered a well-fitted medical mask (preferred) or non-medical mask to use when they are or may be in shared spaces and when receiving direct care if they are suspected or have confirmed COVID.
 - People coming from an outbreak area that require transportation (ex. to an assessment centre, health care provider, off-site location) should use a private vehicle. Public transportation and taxis should be avoided if possible. Limit the number of people in the vehicle to only those who are essential. Vehicle window should be down (weather permitting). Ideally, the driver should wear eye protection (in addition to a medical mask). Person supported should wear a medical mask and sit in the backseat.
 - ~~Temperature wellness checks on individuals in group homes will be done once daily.~~ Temperature checks should still be done only if medically warranted, such as when someone has symptoms of illness. If we are using RAT tests for the people we support and someone is symptomatic and tests negative, they should be re-tested in 24 hours. The COVID lead may advise of PCR testing if a person is symptomatic, please note that EMS will no longer PCR test people in their home.
 - Whenever possible if a person supported is attending a clinical appointment, a medical mask is strongly recommended but not required.
 - Please follow the Travel Guidance provided by Public Health Unit (<https://www.tbdhu.com/travel>).
 - On March 23, 2023, the Ontario government tabled its 2023 Ontario Budget: *Building a Strong Ontario*, the Budget announced that the paid Infectious Disease Emergency Leave (Paid IDEL) expired on March 31, 2023.
 - To reduce anxiety, do not ignore your feelings, remain calm and seek assistance if you are feeling overwhelmed. The OPTIONS NORTHWEST website does include resources for employee health and well-being. In addition, you can reach the Employee Assistance Program at **1-866-331-6851**.
 - Seek information from reliable news sources only.
 - Reminder to use precautions as outlined by Health Canada – Wear a mask when required/recommended, wash your hands, cover your mouth during coughs and sneezes, stay home if you are sick. Get vaccinated. Vaccines are only one method to mitigate risk.....we still need to be vigilant with our PPE use and all of our other precautions.
 - Self-care is critical as worries worsen if we are not looking out for ourselves.

- OPTIONS NORTHWEST Pandemic team meets regularly to address any new announcements, provide updates and to ensure adequate supplies/other necessities are in place.

We are doing everything possible currently to keep safe options available to support people in need of care. We will continue to monitor all the developments of COVID-19 and will continue to inform you of further changes to our services. If you have any questions or concerns, please call 807-344-4994 or email general@optionsnorthwest.com.

On behalf of the Pandemic Team, stay healthy and safe!!!

Thank You!!

