

# COVID-19: UPDATE ON OUR SERVICES OPTIONS NORTHWEST

Service Update #27, Sept. 18, 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 are open to the general public during our regular hours of operation from 8am to 12:00 and 1:00 to 4:00
- Scheduled and unsupervised visits can occur with the following procedures in place:
  - 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.
  - 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.

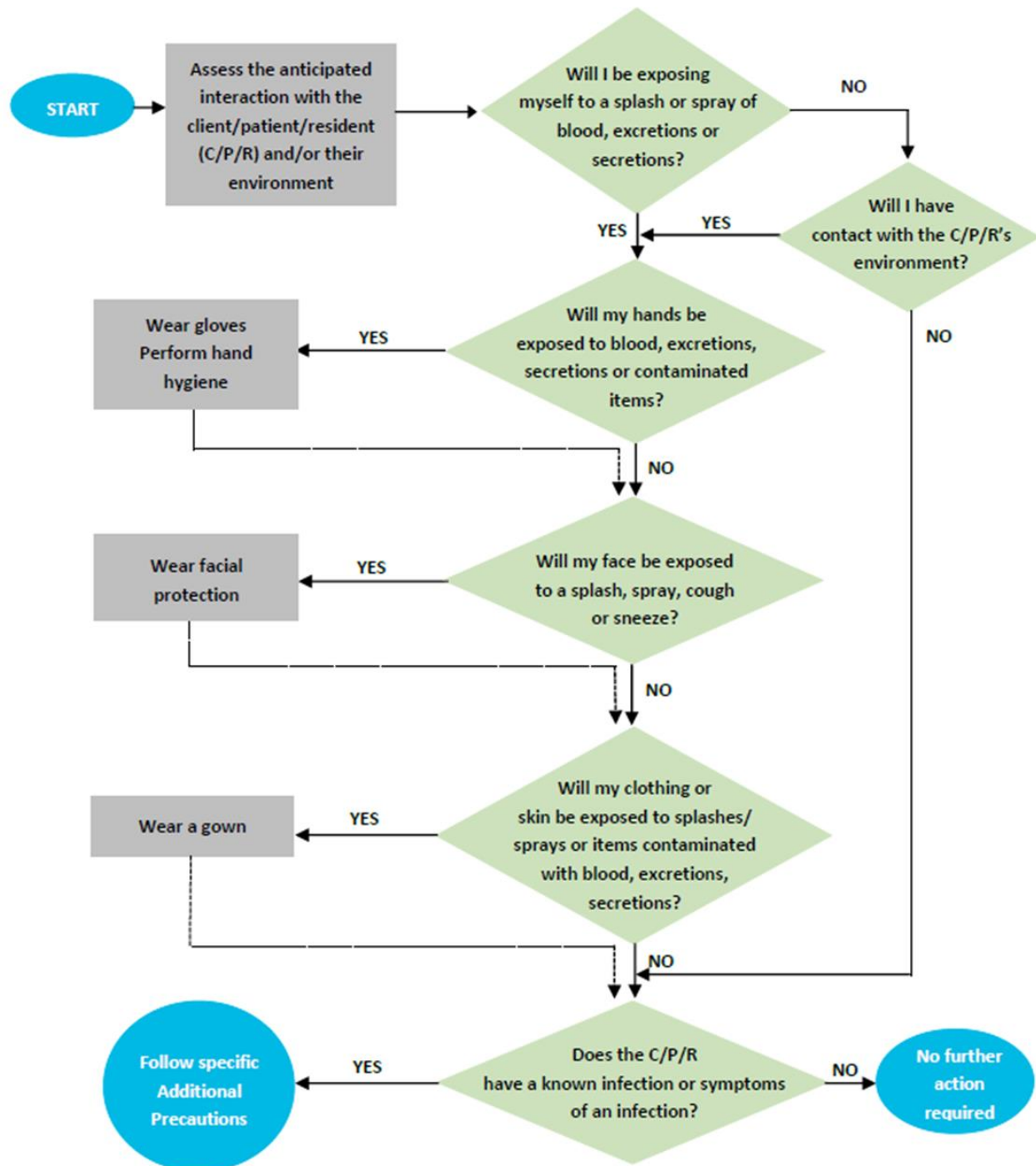
- The Pandemic Team is reminding individuals who participate in the community to follow public health guidelines. Upon return to their home involving any type of absence the people we support no longer need to be actively screened unless they are showing signs of symptoms.
- Please note, while attending 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. Refer to attached information on personal risk assessment to guide you on making an informed choice on when to mask.
- [PCR tests can be booked by contacting the Assessment Centre 807-935-8100 or at https://tb.covidresponse.ca/](https://tb.covidresponse.ca/) PCR testing is free of charge for employees and the people we support. RAT tests are also available in the homes.
- 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.

[Masks are generally required by employees when they cannot physically distance themselves \(remain 6 feet away from others\), if they have been asked to as they have had symptoms, they are supporting someone with symptoms or who is positive with 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, Audits will also be done as recommended by Public Health Unit. Please refer to the following guidelines on when to wear a mask as there are times when you can physically distance that the mask is no longer needed.](#)
- 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.
- If an employee or person we support is symptomatic the Supervisor will alert the COVID lead. COVID related Serious Occurrence Reporting is only needed now if someone is seeking medical attention related to COVID. Employees will need to wear a well fitted mask (preferred N 95) for 10 days from symptom onset/positive test. Employees with COVID-19 or COVID-19 symptoms may return to work once they no longer have a fever and their symptoms have been improving for 24 hours (or 48 hours if they have vomiting/diarrhea).

- 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 back seat. After use the vehicle would need to be thoroughly cleaned.
- 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 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.

## Routine Practices Risk Assessment Algorithm for All Client/Patient/Resident Interactions



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](mailto:general@optionsnorthwest.com).

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

**Thank You!!**