

Covid-Omicron Report

The second Covid wave, with the Delta variant, hit several LTC homes in the initial couple of months of 2021. Covid infections and death in LTC became rare with vaccinations, screening, and infection prevention and control measures. The Delta variant remains a concern with and the current and expanding threat of the Omicron variant. All staff, caregivers and residents in LTC must heighten preventative and protective measures including screening at entry, masking, physical distancing, hand hygiene and staying at home when sick.

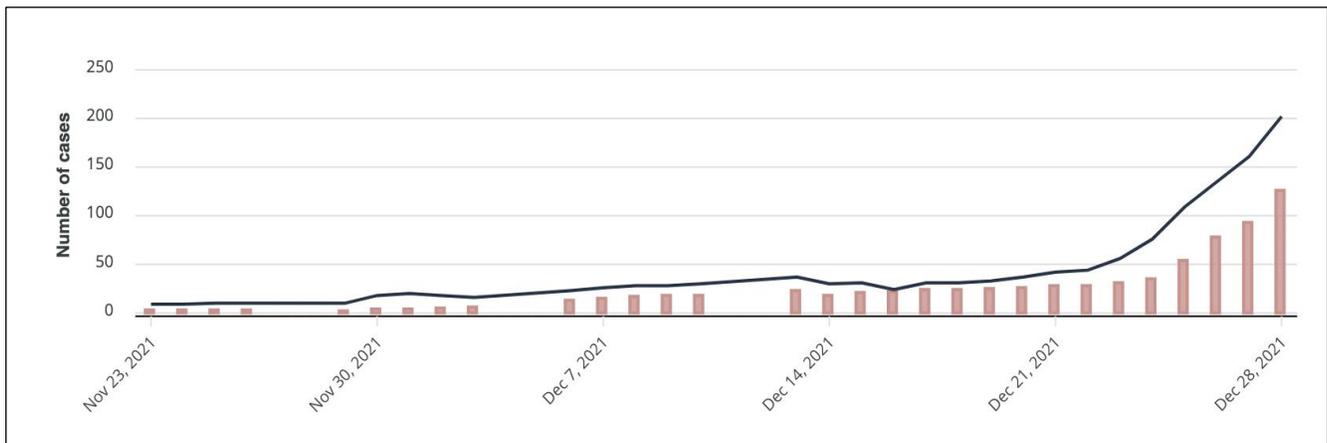
The five days over the Christmas break saw a steady rise in Covid cases. Outbreaks in LTC homes were as low as five one month ago. There are now 32, and the number will increase.

Date	Ont. cases	Ont. deaths	LTC cases	LTC deaths	Outbreaks LTC
Dec 23	676,924	10,146	15,739	4,032	26
Dec 28	725,841	10,171	15,849	4,032	32

As of April 7, 2021, an outbreak is defined as two or more lab-confirmed Covid cases in residents, staff, or other visitors in a home, with an epidemiological link, within a 14-day period, where at least one case could have reasonably acquired their infection in the LTC home. Previously, the definition required one or more lab-confirmed COVID-19 cases in a resident or staff in the long-term care home.

[How Ontario is responding to Covid 19](#)

Surging community cases mean more staff test positive for Covid. LTC staff with Covid are represented by the line in the graph below. The bars represent LTC resident cases. Fortunately, as of November 30, 99% of LTC staff were staff, students and volunteers were fully vaccinated.



EFFECTIVE DECEMBER 30

With the rise of covid cases in the community, LTC will double down efforts to protect residents. Effective today the following temporary measures at LTC homes will go into effect:

- Access to long-term care homes by general visitors will be paused. Designated caregivers may continue to enter long-term care homes.
- Day absences for all residents for social purposes will be paused.

These measures will optimize safety for residents and staff and are in addition to other measures announced earlier this month. All visitors need to be fully vaccinated to enter a home. The exception is end-of-life visits. The province requires all staff, including physicians, caring for a resident with a confirmed or suspected case of COVID-19 to wear a fit-tested, seal-checked N95 respirator. The high transmissibility of the Omicron variant will likely mean staff being exposed to or contracting COVID-19 in the community and more outbreaks in long-term care homes. It is imperative to keep COVID-19 out of homes and prevent spread within homes, with the most important objective being the prevention of severe outcomes for residents and staff.

[Ontario Taking Further Action to Keep Long-Term Care Residents Safe](#)

ORDERS, DIRECTIVES, MEMORANDUMS and OTHER RESOURCES

Changes in Directives #1 and #5 came this month. Directive #1 is for health care providers; Directive #5 for hospitals and LTC homes. Both directives are updates and require, rather recommend, the use N95 protection when providing direct care or interacting with suspect, probable or confirmed COVID-19 patients. That is, “a fit-tested, seal-checked N95 respirator (or approved equivalent i.e. ½ mask respirator), in addition to droplet and Contact precautions, which include face shield, gown and gloves.” For updated health orders, directives and questions and answers go to:

https://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/dir_mem_res.aspx

SILVER LINING POSSIBLE?

Omicron’s lower severity is probably a result of changes in the virus itself, combined with high levels of immunity (from vaccination or prior infection) that have built up in human populations. A study released on December 21st by the National Institute for Communicable Diseases found, after adjustment for age, illnesses, and other factors (including vaccination status and prior infection) which determine the chances of developing severe disease, that Omicron cases are 80% less likely than previous variants to require admission to hospital.

The Omicron wave could recede quickly. Omicron may do more damage in places with poor vaccination rates. By infecting so many people and thus potentially providing widespread immunity to the next variant of concern, Omicron may accelerate covid’s transition from being a dangerous epidemic to something that is an endemic nuisance which people can learn to put up with.

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The Economist

Send Covid experiences and questions to office@oltcc.ca