

PURPOSE

People who use Christian Horizons' services are excited to invite their family and friends over to meet safely while remaining physically distanced. The Ontario Ministry of Children, Community, and Social Services (MCCSS) has established new guidelines that everyone must follow during these visits. Sometimes, essential visits or essential overnight visits are also required for health, wellness and safety, compassionate care, critical maintenance, or any applicable legal rights reasons.

This guide – a combination of previous guidelines and recent updates – helps teams know how to support people through these [visits](#), where permitted, based on MCCSS guidance effective [January 16th, 2021](#), [COVID-19 Guidance for MCCSS-funded and Licensed Congregate Living Settings](#). We will continue to adapt to align with government and public health directions.

Please refer to [COVID-19 Current Activity Restrictions](#) for an outline of which types of visits (indoor/outdoor, overnight) and community outings and engagements are permitted.

FAMILY AND FRIEND VISITS

Connections with families and friends are crucial to people's happiness and wellbeing. While we *foster belonging* using technology where possible, nothing can really replace an in-person visit. We will learn from people who use our services *who* they want to meet with and *how often* those visits might occur, following the guidelines below.

["COVID-19 Visits Social Story"](#) and a ["COVID-19 Visiting Guide for Families or Friends"](#) are available at www.christian-horizons.org/coronavirus to help navigate conversations about visiting. While legislation restricts certain aspects of these visits, the person who uses our services and their family and friends are our priority. We will support each person to visit in a safe and enjoyable environment. We all need to do our part to keep people who use services, families, and Christian Horizons employees safe and healthy.

The following guidelines describe how Christian Horizons will support people and their family and friends in meeting the visitor expectations outlined by MCCSS.

TYPES OF VISITORS:

There are **two** types of visitors as per MCCSS guidelines: Essential, and Non-Essential:

An **Essential Visitor** is generally someone who *"performs essential services to support the ongoing operation of a service agency (including a contractor)" and/or who is "considered necessary to maintain the health, wellness and safety, or any applicable legal rights, of a congregate care resident."* An essential visitor may include, but is not limited to, [a parent/guardian](#), [social service workers](#) (e.g., child welfare workers, day program operators etc.), [health care providers](#) (e.g., doctor, nurse, personal support workers etc.), and [inspectors](#) from MCCSS or public health unit. *"Service providers may use discretion to change who is deemed an essential visitor in the context of changing community risk unless the essential visitor has legal authority to enter the setting (e.g., an inspector)."* See **Essential Visits** guidelines on Page 3 below.

A **Non-Essential Visitor** is someone who *does not meet the definition of an Essential Visitor*.

PREPARING FOR A VISIT:

Program Managers and Team Leads are encouraged to *lead with empathy* and to demonstrate valuing people and their family and friends throughout this process. For further ideas, see the article “[10 Ways to Communicate with Empathy and Authority in Times of Crisis](#).” People will need encouragement and support to focus on the value of the visit and the need to visit in a safe environment.

1) Planning the Visit

- a. Talk/communicate with the person who uses our services to learn what they are looking forward to about the visit. Prepare them for the event using the **COVID-19 Visits Social Story**. Help to set expectations and figure out ways to make the time as enjoyable and meaningful as possible.
- b. Non-essential visits can only take place if the location is not currently experiencing an outbreak. Public Health will determine and declare when a site is no longer in outbreak.
- c. In-person visits can take place at a designated space of the support location, see the **COVID-19 Current Activity Restrictions** for guidance on the number of guests that can be indoors. Outdoor visits are best where possible due to more continuous airflow.
- d. When planning, it should be confirmed that there will be sufficient employees on shift to support both the visit and ongoing location activities.
- e. Essential visitors are not required to pre-book their visits, they are advised to schedule them in advance to avoid wait times in the event that other visitors are present, and the support location cannot accommodate an unannounced visit. Some locations may have certain times where visits are more easily accommodated.
- f. Non- Essential Visits are to be planned in advance:
 - Come up with a visitation plan with each person who uses services (i.e., who they want to meet, who are their non-essential visitors, frequency of visits, length of visits, clarify expectations, etc.). Write an overview of this plan, which must then be approved by the Area Manager. Executive Directors (or someone they designate) will keep a copy of the approved plan for each person. You may use the **COVID-19 Visiting Record** to record information about this plan.
 - For scheduled visits (i.e., non-essential), maintain time in-between visits to allow for surfaces to be disinfected.
 - The **COVID-19 Visiting Record** is to be completed in the ODB for **EVERY** non-essential visit or one-time (not re-occurring) essential visit at support location or essential overnight visit outside of support location.
For re-occurring essential visits, the COVID-19 Visiting Record is to be completed and approved **ONCE**, in advance of the first visit, and documentation of subsequent visits will be recorded in support notes. See **Essential Visits** for more details.
COVID-19 Visiting Records are to be reviewed and approved by the location supervisor before and following visits to confirm they follow the plan.
- g. Employees are aware of the schedule of visits and their responsibilities in either supporting others at the location or the visit directly.
- h. Be familiar with “[COVID-19 Visiting Guide for Families or Friends](#).” Ensure family or friends receive this guide in advance and that someone is available to talk with them about these guidelines as needed.
- i. People who use our services may visit with family or friends through any of the following types of visits:
 - Drive-by visits: Family or friends remain in their vehicle while their friend or loved one is outside of

their home. This may be the best option for people who have difficulty keeping physical distance.

- Outdoor visits: People can be outside (in a driveway or yard/on a porch/deck) together.
- Indoor visits: People can visit in a large, open space indoors that allows for physical distancing.
- Overnight visits: People using services can visit with family or friends overnight for their health and wellbeing. See ***Essential Overnight Visits*** guidelines on Page 4.

2) Preparing the Designated Space

- a. Visits will be held at a designated area that is comfortable, accessible and has the space capacity to allow for physical distancing.
- b. **At least 2 metres (6 ft) physical distance is to be kept between all parties throughout the visit. Unless otherwise mentioned in the COVID-19 Current Activity Restrictions**
- c. The area, including furniture, will be thoroughly cleaned, and disinfected before and after every visit. To reduce exposure risks, family or friends may be encouraged to bring their own lawn chairs if it is an outdoor visit.
- d. Visitors will need to wait outside if the support location is already at capacity with other scheduled visitors and cannot accommodate an unannounced visit due to physical distancing restrictions.

3) Infection Prevention and Control (IPAC) and Screening as per Public Health Guidelines:

- a. Visitors are to use hand sanitizer upon arrival and may be required to wear a mask through the duration of the visit.
- b. All employees must clean their hands thoroughly using hand sanitizer before entering the workplace, after a visit, and after contact with surfaces others have touched.
- c. An active screening station is to be set up prior to the visit. Use masking tape (or other method as necessary) to designate appropriate spacing so that physical distancing can be maintained. The proper documents should be on hand along with hand sanitizer, and PPE.
- d. An employee is designated to complete the active screening.
- e. Active screening will take place for all visitors as per the COVID-19 Screening Protocol, confirming they are not experiencing any COVID-19 symptoms.
- f. Visits will be rescheduled if the visitors do not pass active screening.

4) During the Visit

- a. Employees will support each person to prepare for the visit. An employee should be present or maintain visibility to provide adequate ongoing support and to confirm that the visit proceeds as planned.
- b. Non-essential visitors must remain in the designated visitation area and maintain a 2-metre distance with people using services and employees for the duration of the visit. **Unless otherwise instructed in the COVID-19 Current Activity Restrictions.**
- c. All visitors may wear a surgical/procedure mask (supplied by Christian Horizons). At times the use of masks may be required, refer to local leadership for more details.
- d. Visitors must agree to the parameters of the visit set out in accordance with MCCSS and public health direction. If agreed protocols are not followed, the visit may end early. Any concerns regarding the visit will be documented in the ***COVID-19 Visiting Record***.

ESSENTIAL VISITS

Essential Visits include visits by an Essential Visitor, which can fall under one of the following categories:

1) Compassionate Visits

If a person using services experiences a major health event and/or decline in health (e.g., palliative, critical illness, end-of-life), as determined by their medical practitioner, and district leadership is aware and approved, then, an in-home visit will be permitted on compassionate grounds, following the **“Guidelines for Essential Visits.”**

2) Essential Support Services

The following external professional or support services provided by an Essential Visitor will be deemed essential visits and will follow the **“Guidelines for Essential Visits”** if...

- An intervention is required for a person using services at a Christian Horizons location that necessitates health care services or can only be completed by an external professional (such as a nurse, behaviour therapist, etc.), **OR**
- In consultation with the Community Facilities Specialist, it is determined that a necessary repair or inspection impacting health and safety and ongoing operation of the home is required that can only be completed by an external professional (such as a repair to the air conditioner or furnace, etc.), **AND**
- The visit is vital to maintain the health, wellness, and safety of the person using services, **AND**
- District leadership is aware and approved.

GUIDELINES FOR ESSENTIAL VISITS

Approval is required as per the **COVID-19 Visiting Guide for Locations** process, by the Area Manager and Executive Director. The **COVID-19 Visiting Record** can be used to plan, document, and approve the visit.

The visitor(s) must:

- 1) Pass active screening (i.e., health questions) before entering the location (See **COVID-19 Screening Protocol**).
- 2) All visitors may wear a surgical/procedure mask (supplied by Christian Horizons). At times the use of masks may be required, refer to local leadership for more details.

Note:

If a person using services requires recurring and frequent visits from an essential service worker (e.g., PSW, BT, RN, etc.), at a predictable and/or routine time, please obtain written approval on the plan (e.g., purpose of visit, expected frequency and/or schedule of visits, etc.) from the Area Manager for this collection of visits. In this case, the COVID-19 Visiting Record is to be completed in the ODB and approved once, in advance of the first visit, and documentation of subsequent visits will be recorded in support notes.

OVERNIGHT VISITS

An **overnight absence** (e.g., to a family home), according to MCCSS, *“is one considered necessary to maintain the health, wellness and safety, or any applicable legal rights, of a resident. Service providers should take careful consideration to support residents’ emotional well-being through overnight absences.”*

Enhanced Precautions

The updated guidelines require that people returning after overnight stays must follow enhanced precautions for **10 days**, including:

- ✓ Pass active screening
- ✓ Maintain physical distance from others and limit contact with housemates
- ✓ Avoid using common areas; however, if a common area cannot be avoided, the person must use a surgical/procedure mask
- ✓ Only participate in group activities if physical distancing is maintained and a surgical/procedure mask is used
- ✓ Practice proper hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette
- ✓ Monitor for symptoms of COVID-19

During the 14-day period people may:

- only receive outdoor visitors during the 14 days.
- leave their residence for short stay (non-overnight) absences (e.g., go to school, go on walks and other activities of daily living). MCCSS guidelines for going out in the community should be followed.

GUIDELINES FOR ESSENTIAL AND GENERAL OVERNIGHT VISITS

Approval is required by the Area Manager and Executive Director. The **COVID-19 Visiting Record** can be used to plan, document, and approve the visit.

To help coordinate any overnight visits, we have established clarifying guidance for teams including the steps to follow in safely arranging an essential overnight visit:

- 1) A few hours before an overnight visit commences, both the person and their family should be actively screened for signs and symptoms of COVID-19 using Christian Horizons active screening protocol. People showing signs or symptoms of COVID-19 should reschedule their visit.
- 2) People and their families are to be reminded to exercise appropriate precautions during the stay (e.g. practice respiratory etiquette, hand hygiene, avoid crowded places, practice physical distancing and wear a mask if out in the community if recommended/required, etc.). See resources at: www.christian-horizons.org/coronavirus.
- 3) Remind people and their families to track the places they have gone and who they have been in contact with by completing the Where I've been Timeline tracker together while they're out in the community.
- 4) When the person returns after their essential overnight visit, they will again undergo active screening for signs and symptoms of COVID 19. Those who show symptoms of COVID-19 or anyone who wishes to, will be supported to get tested.
- 5) Upon returning, people who use services that are **fully vaccinated** against COVID-19 only need to pass active screening before entering the home. There are no additional precautions required.
- 6) Upon returning, people who use services that are **not fully vaccinated** are to practice 10-days of enhanced precautions as per the MCCSS guidelines outlined in the Enhanced Precautions box above. If the person receives a negative COVID-19 PCR test during the 10 days of enhanced precautions, the precautions can end on the day the negative result is made available.
- 7) We will assist people using services in obtaining a mask to use during the 14-day period if they do not already have one.
- 8) During the 10 days, the person should continue to be monitored for symptoms of COVID-19 as per the daily monitoring protocol.

VISITS IN THE COMMUNITY

Visits in the community (short-stay absences and outings as referenced by MCCSS) are “*important to maintain the social, emotional well-being and quality of life*” of people using services. These visits or outings (e.g., work, school, medical appointment, activities for pleasure, day visit to a family home, or community engagement and participation) should be facilitated in consistent with the preferences of the person who uses services and within reasonable restrictions that safeguard both people using services and staff.

Information about having visits in the community (e.g. in parks, on patios, at restaurants, at the malls, at a family member's home not overnight, etc.) can be found in the [Going out Safely Guide](#) on our website.

GUIDELINES FOR VISITS IN THE COMMUNITY

The following are a few important reminders of how teams can help support people who use our services to safely visit in the community:

- 1) Exercise appropriate precautions while out in the community (e.g. practice respiratory etiquette, hand hygiene, avoid crowded places, practice physical distancing and wear mask when suggested/required).
- 2) Track who they have been in contact with and where they have gone in case they start to feel sick and need to let others know by completing the [Where I've been Timeline](#) tracker.
- 3) When the person returns home, they will undergo active screening for signs and symptoms of COVID 19. Those who show symptoms of COVID-19 or anyone who wishes to, will be supported to get tested.

The [Safety in Your Community Social Story](#), [Rules and Risks Social Story](#), and [Going out? Do it Safely](#) can be used to help people understand or explain how to safely spend time in the community.