

Feb 23 2021 Global News Manitoba personal care homes won't see big visitation changes after vaccinations

They are some of the most vulnerable in the province when it comes to potentially severe outcomes from contracting [COVID-19](#), and even after seniors in care homes receive their vaccinations, there won't be big changes to visitor restrictions.

The province said it plans to have all personal care home (PCH) residents fully immunized with both doses of the vaccine by the end of February. However, the chief provincial public health officer said it doesn't mean there will be changes to the visitation policies in place.

"Immediately, we probably will not make that change," Dr. Brent Roussin said Monday.

"Things like visitation guidelines, over time, we'll be able to change those. But it's not something that we're going to just immediately tie to vaccination."

Getting the vaccine is still a choice and not every person inside PCHs will have received one.

Coronavirus: Manitoba reports 2 additional COVID-19 deaths, 97 new cases

"We still have very vulnerable people within those settings. We know that vaccine uptake is not 100 per cent. It's been very good. It's not 100 per cent," Roussin said. "And we know that vaccine effectiveness, like any vaccine, isn't 100 per cent."

Manitoba is still in level red, or critical, when it comes to restrictions.

In personal care homes, it means each resident can have two designated caregivers who are able to visit. They are required to follow strict protocols and only one may visit at a time.

"We really need to do everything in our power to balance the needs of the residents to see their families and friends with added safety," said Jan Legeros, executive director of the Long Term and Continuing Care Association of Manitoba.

Even so, Legeros echoed Roussin's words and said Manitobans shouldn't expect to see a change to visitations soon.

"We're not going to see any dramatic changes," she said. "There are so many factors that need to come into play before decisions like that can be made because the ultimate goal, of course, is to make sure we keep everyone safe."

Throughout the level-red restrictions, Legeros said many care homes are doing their best to try to maintain any sense of normalcy for residents as possible.

Some have been able to allow residents to have their meals back in the dining halls if they can maintain social distance and others have been able to keep small levels of activities happening as well.

But in the end, it depends on each home's outbreak situation and whether or not the infrastructure allows for enough distancing to occur.

"It all depends on the risk situation in each of those care facilities," she said.

In September, the province announced Manitoba would be getting new outdoor all-season shelters made out of repurposed single-use shipping containers to allow for residents of personal care homes to visit with loved ones amid the pandemic.

At the time, the government said \$17.9 million would go towards building 90 shelters by late fall. However, under level red, those shelters are also facing restricted access. "Even in the shelters where we have visitations occurring there are no general visitors allowed in the shelters indoor or outdoor still," said Legeros.

Winnipeg has 29 indoor shelters and 28 outdoor ones, said Legeros, a third of which are still being worked on or are in need of final completion while others are facing personnel problems.

"Some homes are still trying to recruit the staff necessary to help take care of residents while they are in the shelter and help with the extensive cleaning that needs to go on," she said.

The Winnipeg Regional Health Authority told Global News of the 39 long-term care facilities within its jurisdiction, 36 have 'minimally one visitation space that is operational.' One other is expected to have a space available in March while two others have no determined dates for visitation spaces yet.