



FIGHTING TO KEEP THE MOST VULNERABLE SAFE

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COVID19

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Overview

Established in 2009, Seasons Retirement Communities (Seasons) is a Canadian company that owns and operates senior housing in Ontario and Alberta. Between the two provinces, Seasons has 23 locations that maintain a culture of putting residents first and providing superior customer service.



A photo of Seasons Strathroy. Image source: seasonsretirement.com

Since March 13, 2020, following Seasons' announcement that visitors would be limited to those who are "essential", the company has communicated its policies, protocols and efforts to protect its residents. On March 28, Niagara Region Public Health confirmed the first two cases of COVID-19 detected at Seasons' Welland, Ont. location.

The following case study outlines the communications made by Seasons, the media coverage it received, how the company responded to its first outbreak of COVID-19 and how it is working around-the-clock to protect its residents.

Website and Social Media Accounts



Seasonsretirement.com



[@seasonsretirement](https://www.instagram.com/seasonsretirement)



[@SeasonsRC](https://twitter.com/SeasonsRC)



[@seasonsretirement](https://www.facebook.com/seasonsretirement)



[Seasons Retirement Communities](https://www.linkedin.com/company/Seasons%20Retirement%20Communities)



[Seasons Retirement Communities](https://www.youtube.com/Seasons%20Retirement%20Communities)

Key dates

Dec 31, 2019

A pneumonia of unknown cause detected in Wuhan, China was first reported to the World Health Organization Country Office in China



Jan 25, 2020

First reported case of coronavirus in Toronto, Ontario



March 5

Alberta confirms first case of COVID-19 in a resident who recently travelled aboard the Grand Princess cruise ship



March 11

World Health Organization categorizes COVID-19 as a pandemic



March 13

Seasons limits traffic to "essential visitors only", a measure Ontario Ministry of Health made a requirement as of March 14



March 17

Ontario Premier Doug Ford declares a state of emergency in response to the pandemic and urges all non-essential businesses to close



March 22

Seasons implements 20% "Thank You Bonus" to its front-line workers for the duration of Seasons' heightened precautionary protocols around COVID-19



March 28

CEO announces Niagara Region Public Health has confirmed 2 cases of COVID-19 at Seasons Welland



March 30

COO announces that due to experts calling the next two-weeks critical to slow the spread of COVID-19, residents will be isolated to their suites



April 17

Seasons High River in Alberta is placed in outbreak status after four team members test positive for COVID-19



Precautionary measures and ‘essential visitors’ defined

On Friday, March 13, 2020, Seasons released its first statement regarding COVID-19 to the public through its website and social media accounts. These communications were added to the *Company* section of its website (See Appendix A), with a banner on its homepage to direct anyone seeking information on COVID-19 to that section.

The statement announced that moving forward only essential visitors would be permitted, which was defined by the Ministry of Health as those who have a very ill family member. The statement also included these measures:

- Monitoring travel
- Enhanced cleaning routines
- Additional education
- Fun programs

A blog post on ways to connect with your loved ones during the pandemic was included in the statement. Some of the suggestions included using technology to connect, creating a care package and dropping off baked goods from your favourite recipes. The blog post even suggested instructing loved ones to write out family recipes or have residents begin journaling stories from the family history.

On Saturday, March 14, the Ontario Ministry of Health required that retirement communities limit access to essential visitors only, until further notice. Alberta Health implemented the same protocol the following day.

This was communicated to the public by Seasons in its March 18 statement from COO LeighAnne Voll. Voll reported Seasons had created a Corporate Infection Control Committee (CICC) to plan for every stage of a potential outbreak and to provide regular communication to all stakeholders. She assured the public that Seasons had implemented active screenings for staff, vendors and essential visitors. Seasons also enhanced its cleaning protocols and limited activities to small groups.

Seasons says 'Thank You' with 20 per cent bonus for front-line workers

Seasons announced in its March 22 statement that it would be implementing a bonus of 20 per cent to its front-line team members' regular wages. This statement was also shared on Seasons' social media platforms and received positive comments praising the decision. A picture of the letter can be seen in *Figure 1.1*. Comments from Seasons' Facebook account can be seen in *Figure 1.2*.



FIGURE 1.1 -

A picture of the letter shared on Seasons' social media platforms announcing its 'Thank You' bonus



FIGURE 1.2 -

Facebook comments from the 'Thank You Bonus' announcement, retrieved on May 3, 2020.

The following day, Seasons updated its 'Thank You Bonus' announcement to include, that in alignment with a directive from Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health (CMOH), "residents should not be permitted to leave their [retirement] home" with exceptions to any medical necessity.

Seasons concluded that, while it was an Ontario directive, its Alberta locations would be following suit in the best interest of its residents. In the event a resident did need to leave for any reason, that resident would be required to complete a health screening checklist upon their return and self-isolate in their suite for a period of 72 hours to 14 days. As with all of Seasons' statements, after signing off they provided readers with additional COVID-19 resources for Ontarians and Albertans which can be seen in *Figure 1.3*.

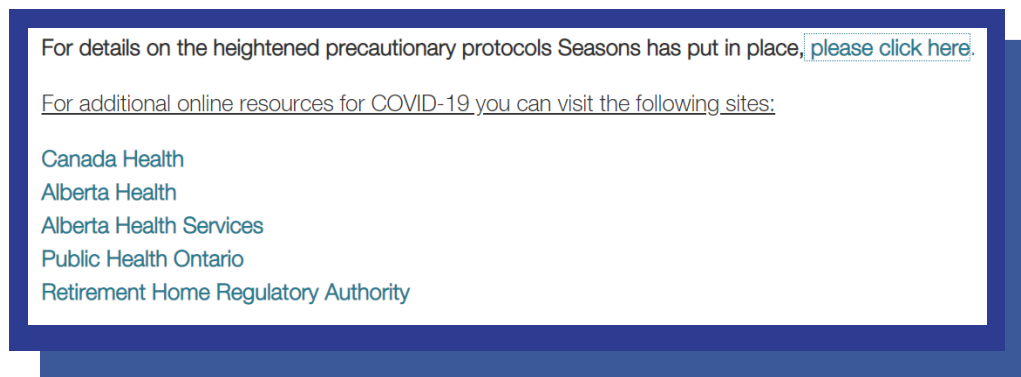


FIGURE 1.3 -

A list of resources included in the sign-off for all of Seasons' formal statements

COVID-19 outbreak confirmed at Seasons' Welland

On March 27, 2020, Niagara Region Public Health declared outbreak status for Seasons Welland. The first resident, who was considered a presumptive case of COVID-19, became symptomatic on March 18. The second resident became symptomatic on March 23. Both individuals were subsequently taken to the hospital and tested for the virus.

Seasons' updated its March 28 statement to respond to the outbreak and reassure the public of the measures taken. It included a letter from CEO Michael Lavallée. In his letter, Lavallée addressed any confusion surrounding the outbreak and further explained how Seasons responded from the time it was informed of the two presumptive cases. The full letter can be seen in Appendix B.

On March 30, public health officials reported that the following two weeks were a crucial time for assessing whether preventative measures had decreased the overall infection rate of the virus. Seasons addressed this to the public with a new safety measure for its residents. Its statement included excerpt:

"Experts are telling us that we are now at a critical point in Canada's fight against the spread of COVID-19. Therefore, in an abundance of caution and with our residents' health in mind, we have made the decision to isolate all residents to their suites for a period of two weeks, beginning Tuesday, March 31. At this time, we believe that this is the right precautionary measure to keep our residents and staff safe."



A photo of Seasons Welland.
Image source: seasonsretirement.com

On April 1, 2020, Seasons Strathroy was declared to be in outbreak status when one resident was confirmed to have COVID-19. This was the company's second location to be directly affected by the virus. No formal statements were made at this time via the Seasons website or any of its social media platforms.

'A Little Extra Love Notes' campaign launched to combat the hard times

On April 6, in the second week of its 14-day isolation protocol, Seasons made an effort to cheer up staff and residents by launching a, "A Little Extra Love Notes", campaign. This campaign called for the public to send cards, notes and artwork, which in turn, would then be shared in residents' homes and on Seasons' social media; to combat the stress caused by the pandemic.

For three weeks, Seasons gathered 'love notes' and documented the compassionate efforts of those who participated in the campaign. Compilation videos were posted to Seasons' YouTube channel and shared on all of its social media platforms. Click [here](#) to see an example. *Figure 1.4* is an example of some of the notes made by Seasons' residents and their families. These were shared on Seasons' Twitter account with the hashtag #ALittleExtraLove.



FIGURE 1.4 -

Examples of the participation from residents and their families for the 'A Little Extra Love' campaign.

Extending isolation, PPE and an employee outbreak

Seasons continued to isolate residents and ensure that personal protective equipment (PPE) was being worn by staff who could not maintain a safe social distance from residents. On April 10, following discussions with Public Health, Seasons CICC made the decision to continue isolating residents to their suites. This was communicated along with Seasons' regular updates on April 13, through the company's website.

On April 13, Seasons announced that it would be donating \$40K to Food Banks Canada due to the impact of COVID-19. To read more about this initiative and the partnership between Seasons and Food Banks Canada click [here](#).



On April 17, Voll released another statement to address the Strathroy outbreak. The statement was updated the following day to inform the public that Dr. Hu, the Calgary Zone Medical Officer, placed Alberta location Seasons High River in outbreak status. This status was given after four staff members tested positive for COVID-19. Three of those team members had contact with someone in their household who worked at the Cargill meat processing plant. Voll assured the public that all precautions were being continued and thanked everyone for their patience.

The Cargill Protein facility in High River, Alta., had been dealing with its own outbreak of COVID-19 and negative media attention surrounding its practices and protections for staff during the pandemic.

CTV News covered the story and included a quote, from a statement made by Seasons' CEO Michael Lavallée, who said, "None of these team members have been at our retirement community since April 6 or earlier, and we have no resident cases at this time."

Click [here](#) to read the full article.

By the time Seasons issued its April 20 statement, there was an additional staff member infected, bringing the total to five employees. A full copy of the statement can be found in Appendix C. Seasons' COO addressed the matter with the following excerpt:

"Additionally, late last week we were informed that five team members at Seasons High River tested positive for COVID-19. Four out of these five team members had close contact with someone in their household who works at the Cargill meat processing plant. The daily health screening tool we use for all team members worked as intended; through this protocol, we were able to identify at-risk team members and advise them to self-isolate at home. We are currently awaiting test results for other team members. Thankfully, we have no suspected resident cases at this time...."

- LeighAnne Voll, Chief Operating Officer, Seasons

Media coverage of employee outbreak

Click the following headlines to see various media outlets that covered the link between the outbreak and the Cargill meat processing plant:

[Cargill Cases Tied To High River Seniors Home](#)

[More than 350 cases of COVID-19 confirmed in connection with Cargill meat plant](#)

[Cargill meat processing plant in High River to be idled after COVID-19 outbreak](#)

Ontario launches 'pandemic pay' program, Seasons honours overlapping bonus

On April 25, 2020, the Ontario government announced its 'pandemic pay' program, for front-line workers. Individuals working at long-term care and retirement homes were among those eligible for the pay increase. Learn more about the program from the CBC [here](#).

Seasons' front-line staff had already been collecting a 'Thank You Bonus' from the company since March 23. A statement was released by Voll, on April 27, to announce that after careful review, employees would be transferring over to the 'pandemic pay' program as it would be more beneficial for the staff. The statement also announced that Seasons would continue to honour its original staff bonus, concurrently with the pandemic pay program, until May 8. The full statement can be read in Appendix D. The company shared news of the program on its social media accounts, thanking Premier Ford, with a picture of its staff holding signs. The post and the comments received from the public can be seen in *Figure 1.5*.

Other statements made by Seasons on April 27 included, providing a list of locations still in outbreak status (Welland and High River), celebrating the lift of outbreak status at its Strathroy location and announcing widespread testing of all staff and residents to come the following week.



FIGURE 1.5 -

Facebook post and the public's reaction to Seasons addressing the program and its plan for front-line employees.

Prioritizing well-being

Protecting seniors from COVID-19, while maintaining their quality of life, comes with its own set of challenges. Seasons consistently took measures to protect its residents and staff as diligently as possible. Protocols were communicated, visitors were limited and residents were engaged as safely as possible, while keeping their health and safety at the forefront of all decision-making.

The care shown by Seasons' staff and their ability to uplift its residents during such an unprecedented time, is visible in the messages and comments left throughout its social media channels. While Seasons does not receive a large amount of engagement on its social media platforms, its comments were consistently positive. The attention given to communicating about COVID-19, did not stop Seasons from keeping residents' well-being and happiness a priority.

Most importantly, Seasons did not forget the individuals that make everything possible, its front-line workers. They implemented a bonus without leaving the responsibility to the government. When the government did provide the necessary funding, Seasons let its staff enjoy a double bonus to show #ALittleExtraLove.



Seasons' Twitter profile banner. Image source: twitter.com/SeasonsRC

Appendix A

Text taken from <https://www.seasonsretirement.com/company/news/how-seasons-is-managing-covid-19/>

MARCH 13, 2020 BY ADMIN -

How Seasons is Managing COVID-19

We at Seasons take the health and safety of our residents and team members very seriously.

To enhance the protection of our residents, staff and visitors from COVID-19 transmission, all Seasons Retirement Communities have implemented heightened precautionary protocols. We are following the advice of Health Canada, the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC), Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, the Retirement Home Regulatory Authority (RHRA) and Alberta Health, as well as communicating with local Public Health authorities in our communities.

We have implemented the following:

Essential Visitors Only. In order to ensure a safe and healthy environment for staff and residents, we will only allow essential visitors until further notice. The Ministry of Health has defined “essential visitors” as those who have a very ill family member. We will re-evaluate this protocol in the coming weeks and ensure consistency with enhanced public health measures. We know these restrictions can be hard on residents and families. Please see our blog article on ways to stay connected to elderly loved ones during this time.

Monitoring Travel. Seasons requires staff to advise their supervisor of any travel plans and provide travel itineraries. We require team members to self-isolate if they feel they may have been exposed to, or are at risk of having the virus, or who have traveled internationally within the last 14 days.

Enhanced Cleaning Routines. Infection control protocols for increased cleaning of high touch point areas. Hand sanitizer will be readily available in key amenity areas.

Additional Education. All residents and team members have received a COVID-19 prevention poster and residents will be participating in a proper hand-washing tutorial.

Fun Programs. We have cancelled all public events, such as our Spring Open House, to control large groups of the general public from entering our homes. So long as we are not in outbreak, small group events with our own residents will continue. We are strongly encouraging residents to reschedule non-essential appointments and outings.

We will continue to update this information as we update our precautionary protocols.

Appendix B

Text taken from <https://www.seasonsretirement.com/company/news/updates-on-covid-19/>

A Letter from our CEO on Seasons Welland

In an effort to be completely transparent, we want to clarify some confusion around the outbreak status at our Welland location.

On March 25, Niagara Region Public Health advised that we had a presumptive case of COVID-19. Seasons immediately took matters to in our own hands and treated the situation as though we did have a confirmed case, by isolating all residents in an abundance of caution. This means residents are receiving daily temperature and wellness checks and all meals to their suites.

On Friday, March 27, Niagara Region Public Health advised that we had a second presumptive case and placed the home in outbreak status.

It is important to know, in both presumptive cases, those individual residents were isolated immediately when they presented symptoms and team members used PPE when delivering care and wellness checks. They are now in hospital, we are in contact with their families, and our thoughts are with them.

Regardless of what Public Health included in their press release on March 27, it was not until Saturday, March 28 that Niagara Region Public Health advised that Seasons should go ahead and consider these cases confirmed.

Please rest assured that the health and safety of our staff and residents is our greatest priority. We have been working closely with Niagara Region Public Health to contain the spread of the virus and we will continue to ask for transparency and alignment when messaging to our community in the future.

We know these are complicated times and I understand that you may be worried. Please rest assured that we remain vigilant in our infection control policies and procedures. All decisions are being made with our staff and residents' best interests in mind.

Thank you for the trust you have placed in Seasons Retirement Communities.

Sincerely,

Michael Lavallée,
Chief Executive Officer

Appendix C

Text taken from

<https://www.seasonsretirement.com/company/news/seasons-response-to-covid-19-april-20-update-from-our-chief-operating-officer/>

April 20 Update from our Chief Operating Officer: Seasons Response to COVID-19

I want to begin by providing an update on our homes in outbreak status. The teams at Seasons Welland and Seasons Strathroy continue to work closely with their local Public Health units and we thank them for their commitment to our residents' safety and well-being.

Additionally, late last week we were informed that five team members at Seasons High River tested positive for COVID-19. Four out of these five team members had close contact with someone in their household who works at the Cargill meat processing plant. The daily health screening tool we use for all team members worked as intended; through this protocol, we were able to identify at-risk team members and advise them to self-isolate at home. We are currently awaiting test results for other team members. Thankfully, we have no suspected resident cases at this time.

I want to thank our residents for their patience with our suite-isolation practice. We are working on plans to reintroduce "normalcy" to our operations, however; wide-spread testing of asymptomatic residents and staff is still not available to retirement homes, and we know that when people gather in groups there is an increased risk for transmission. This leads us to believe the risk to residents remains high. Without the ability to test everyone, we believe that insulating residents from contamination in the larger community is one of our best defenses against the spread of COVID-19 in our homes.

For everyone's protection, we continue to follow Public Health guidelines regarding the use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). As of last week, we updated our protocol to direct all staff members to wear masks at work. For a list of all our Heightened Precautionary Protocols, please click [here](#).

We are keenly aware of how difficult isolation is for our residents. Our teams continue to look for ways to safely engage and connect with residents, paying particular attention to their mental health and emotional well-being.

Thank you to all Seasons team members who continue to creatively create "wow-moments" for our residents. I have received numerous letters and calls from residents and families who deeply appreciate these efforts.

It has been heartwarming to hear of the many acts of kindness the friends and families of Seasons have been sending to our staff and residents. Thank you all, it means a lot. You can see examples of this 'Little Extra Love' on our Seasons Facebook page and social media channels.

Please rest assured that we remain vigilant in our efforts to keep Seasons team members and residents safe and healthy.

We will get through this together.

Sincerely,

LeighAnne Voll, Chief Operating Officer

Appendix D

Text taken from:

<https://www.seasonsretirement.com/company/news/ontario-government-announces-pandemic-pay-program/>

APRIL 27, 2020 BY ADMIN

The Ontario Government Announces Pandemic Pay Program The Government of Ontario just announced a plan to roll out a Pandemic Pay program to frontline staff in retirement communities with a \$4.00 per hour worked premium on top of existing hourly wages, regardless of the qualified employee's hourly wage. Additionally, it will provide a \$250 bonus for frontline staff working over 100 hours per month up to \$1000. This program will run for the next 16 weeks.

We want to thank Premier Doug Ford for recognizing our frontline heroes for their dedication and courage during this unprecedented challenge to our sector.

Seasons Retirement Communities made the decision to offer a 20% Thank You bonus on the regular wages of all hourly employees, effective March 23, 2020. We felt this was the right thing to do to ensure our team members felt appreciated for the important work they were doing to keep our residents safe during Seasons' enhanced precautionary protocols. We advised at the time that we would give employees two weeks' notice of the conclusion of our Thank You Bonus.

We have studied the impact of both the Seasons Thank You program and the Government of Ontario's Pandemic Pay program to our staff: It is clear that the government program will offer you greater value. Therefore, effective Friday, April 24, 2020 Seasons will be transitioning all employees to this government program.

However, as a demonstration of our commitment to our staff, Seasons will continue to pay out our Thank You Bonus for the two week notice period as promised, ending May 8, 2020. That means from April 24 to May 8, both the Ontario Government and Seasons bonuses will be applied to staff wages.

We want to thank our team members for their continued dedication to our residents, and to one another, during this challenging time. We have heard from countless residents and their family members about the creative and thoughtful "wow moments" they have been delivering each day. We see the work you are doing, and we are thankful that the Ontario Government is acknowledging your efforts, too.

You are our frontline heroes, Team Seasons. Thank you.

Sincerely,

LeighAnne Voll, Chief Operating Officer