STAFF ARTICLE

Programming during outbreak isolation

Updated October 2025

When a unit closes to group programs, recreation keeps going. It moves to doorways, phones, tablets, and one-page cards that infection control can approve. This article is for recreation therapists and activity aides in Canadian long-term care who need a realistic isolation playbook that respects PPE, staffing shortages, and resident loneliness.

Reset expectations with leadership early

Clarify what is allowed hour by hour. Some outbreaks permit doorway bingo. Others allow only individual drops. Align with medical director and infection prevention before you promise families a concert on the floor.

Post a simple status board families can read: **Group programs paused. Room delivery active.** Update it when rules change.

Room delivery at scale

Batch room cards by hall. One aide pushes a cart with labelled envelopes. Knock, leave materials if the resident prefers solo play, or offer a two-minute chat from the threshold. Log who received what so each room gets fresh content.

Use low-ink prints. Residents may keep cards for several days. Swap content midweek if boredom shows.

Digital options when screens are allowed

Slideshow HTML packs on a sanitized tablet held at the door can replace paper when laundry volume is high. Keep brightness moderate. Offer captions for hearing loss.

Offer paper first. Switch to screen when the resident prefers it.

Sensory and movement within one room

Chair stretches, scarf movement to slow music, and scent jars with lids tight enough for spill control can run in each room. Send aides a one-minute video demo link or a sketch on the whiteboard.

Use personal rhythm tools only, with wipe protocol between rooms.

Supporting staff morale

Isolation weeks exhaust everyone. Schedule a five-minute recreation huddle on secure chat or at a safe distance. Share one win daily. **Room 214 smiled at the bird photo card.**

Protect recreation staff from reassignment so programming stays alive. Even two visits per hall per shift matters.

Family communication

Email families a weekly note with photos of materials, unless consent allows resident faces. Suggest they mail postcards. Offer a drop box for children’s drawings that quarantine before delivery.

Be honest when programs are limited. Families appreciate clarity.

Transition back to groups

When restrictions lift, stage return slowly. Small circles before full bingo. Watch for anxiety in residents who grew used to quiet rooms. Keep room cards available for those who opt out of groups.

Debrief with nursing on which residents declined visits during isolation so follow-up continues.

Documentation for the next outbreak

Save the cart checklist, approved materials list, and timing that worked. Note printer settings that reduced trips. Store in a shared drive folder named **Outbreak recreation 2025.**

Doorway bingo and one-to-one games

When IPAC allows, staff can call bingo from the hall while residents mark cards at their doors. Use large print and verbal repeats. Prizes might be a pen with a grip or a sticker, with food prizes only when dietary approves.

Trivia can follow the same format. Read questions slowly. Accept answers shouted from doorways if infection control permits brief conversation.

Technology pitfalls

Tablets shared between rooms need wipe protocol between each stop. Headphones should be single-user or covered with disposable liners if policy allows. Charge devices overnight. Keep a charged spare in the tote.

Offer tech-free backup in the same tote.

Residents who decline

Some people want quiet during isolation. Document **declined visit, offered card** in neutral words. Retry another day with a different material. Persistent declines go to the recreation therapist for a personalized plan.

Staffing models when recreation is pulled to other duties

If recreation staff redeploy, train nursing aides on one card per shift. A three-minute script on the nursing huddle whiteboard keeps programming alive. **Today’s card: bird photo. Ask what birds they knew as children.**

Leadership should see isolation programming as essential care.

Legal and privacy reminders

Photograph residents in isolation for social media only with consent forms. Share outbreak status in public hallways at a calm volume.

Sample seven-day isolation menu

Day	Doorway drop	Optional chat
Mon	Harvest word search	Two-minute prompt
Tue	Photo decade sort	Decline OK
Wed	Scent jar card	Staff only if agitated
Thu	Balloon volleyball at door	Seated taps
Fri	Family postcard template	Help addressing envelope
Sat	Quiet music link on tablet	Headphones
Sun	Spiritual care coordinate	Per chaplain

Swap themes to match season and pack library.

Your next step: pack one isolation tote today with ten room cards, hand sanitizer, and a log sheet. Ask infection prevention which doorway distance they want before the next unit test.

BetterCare printable recreation resources for Canadian long-term care, personal care homes, and retirement residences. Share with your team. Adapt for local policy and clinical direction.