Information for residents of residential aged care services, their family members and visitors

Older people are more at risk of both contracting COVID-19, and having a serious illness as a result. Managers, staff, family, friends and residents need to work together to protect our most vulnerable community members.

In order to protect older people, new restrictions on visits to aged care facilities apply. It is important staff, visitors and visiting workers take care to ensure they stay away from residential aged care services if they may have COVID-19. They should closely monitor their own health, and will be asked to provide details on their health status before entering a facility.

Residents

Like all members of the community, people who live in residential aged care services have an important role to play in protecting their own health. In addition to practising good hygiene and social distancing, there will be restrictions on visits to residential aged care facilities. Large group visits, gatherings, and external excursions will be postponed. Residents will be supported to stay connected with family and friends by phone and video calls.

If you develop symptoms of COVID-19, you will be kept separate from other residents and will not be able to see visitors. Health care and residential care workers will continue to provide support and care while you are isolated. If you need to leave your room, such as for medical care, you will be required to wear a surgical mask, which will be provided by health care workers. There is no need for any healthy resident to wear a mask.

Visitors

Visitors who have returned from overseas or been in contact with someone confirmed to have COVID-19 in the last 14 days will not be able to visit a residential aged care facility. Nor will anyone with a fever, symptoms of a respiratory illness, or who has not been vaccinated against influenza, be able to visit.

From 1 May, you must have your influenza vaccination in order to visit an aged care facility.

Visits should be short, and conducted in the resident's room, outside, or in a specific designated area (not a communal space).

Each resident may have no more than two visitors, including doctors, at a time, and visits by children 16 years and under are not permitted except in special circumstances.

All visitors will need to wash their hands before entering and leaving a resident's room and will be encouraged to practise social distancing where possible, including to stay away when unwell.

Managers and staff

The Government has announced that residential aged care facilities should take extra precautions to keep residents safe from COVID-19. The health of staff will be closely monitored, new and returning residents will be screened before entry, and signage and other forms of communication will be used to explain the steps being taken to protect the health of residents.

To make more workers available to aged care providers, the Government is relaxing international student visa work conditions for aged care facilities and home care providers. This will allow international student nurses and other aged care workers to work more than the 40 hours a fortnight. There are currently around 20,000 international student nurses studying in Australia.

How can we help prevent the spread of coronavirus?

Practising good hand and sneeze/cough hygiene is the best defence against most viruses. You should:

- wash your hands frequently with soap and water, including before and after eating, and after going to the toilet
- cover your cough and sneeze, dispose of tissues, and wash your hands, and
- avoid contact with others (stay more than 1.5 metres from people whenever possible).

More information

While coronavirus is of concern, it is important to remember that most people displaying symptoms such as fever, cough, sore throat or tiredness are likely suffering with a cold or other respiratory illness – not COVID-19.

For the latest advice, information and resources, go to www.health.gov.au

Call the National Coronavirus Help Line on 1800 020 080. It operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week. If you require translating or interpreting services, call 131 450.

The phone number of each state or territory public health agency is available at www.health.gov.au/state-territory-contacts

If you have concerns about your health, speak to a doctor.