



**Australian Government**

**Department of Health**

**Chief Medical Officer**

## **Residential Aged Care Infection Control and Emergency Planning**

Dear Providers

COVID-19 (formerly known as novel coronavirus) presents a challenge for all involved in providing care to vulnerable people, including the residential aged care sector. The COVID-19 situation is evolving, and as we move toward the 2020 influenza season, I note that there is a need for collaboration between the Commonwealth, the aged care sector, state and territory public health authorities, and the healthcare sector as part of our COVID-19 planning and preparedness activity.

Firstly, I would like to reiterate the importance of infection control and being prepared for health emergencies. Aged care homes often have frequent visitors and carers coming and going, and close physical contact between staff, residents and their families. Elderly residents are more at risk of infections generally, and are particularly vulnerable to serious illness if they do become infected.

In this context, and within the context of the Aged Care Quality Standards, your implementation of standard and transmission-based precautions to prevent and control infections is an important action. Indeed, aged care homes are expected to assess the risk of, and take steps to prevent, detect and control, the spread of infections. Infection management practices, such as isolating infectious individuals and applying standard precautions to prevent transmission, minimise the risk of infection spreading.

Homes should implement effective infection prevention and control programs that are in line with national guidelines. The *Australian Guidelines for the Prevention and Control of Infection in Healthcare* set out the requirements for best practice infection control. Infection prevention and control programs will vary between aged care homes, depending on the nature of the care and services provided, the context and the risk.

As well as implementing an infection control program, there should be established protocols in place at aged care homes to manage any health emergencies that arise, including service-wide infection outbreaks or broader community epidemics. While the number of cases of COVID-19 is currently small in Australia, it is possible that this situation could change and services need to plan and be prepared for this.

An aged care home emergency plan would consider factors such as:

- first steps if infection is suspected or identified (e.g. seeking medical assessment, diagnosis and contact with local public health officials, if needed);
- arrangements to ensure adequate care of the infected individual (e.g. staffing, isolation/quarantine within the facility, medical care, further liaison with public health officials);
- protection measures for other residents, visitors and staff; and
- notification advice to families, carers and relevant authorities.

The Department of Health has developed the *Australian Health Sector Emergency Response Plan for Novel Coronavirus*, which is a useful reference tool for preparing your emergency plan, particularly with respect to pandemic infections. This can be found at: [www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/australian-health-sector-emergency-response-plan-for-novel-coronavirus-covid-19](http://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/australian-health-sector-emergency-response-plan-for-novel-coronavirus-covid-19).

Further information on the public health management of COVID-19 is available in the Communicable Diseases Network Australia (CDNA) National Guidelines for Public Health Units in the Series of National Guidelines (SoNGs) - [www1.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/cdna-song-novel-coronavirus.htm](http://www1.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/cdna-song-novel-coronavirus.htm).

Factsheets and resources specifically for aged care staff, residents and families that provide advice on measures to limit transmission of the virus are available on the Department's website - [www.health.gov.au/resources/collections/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-resources](http://www.health.gov.au/resources/collections/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-resources).

A 24-hour National Coronavirus Health Information Line available on 1800 020 080. The line provides health and situation information on the COVID-19 outbreak.

The Department looks forward to working with the sector and other stakeholders on the your preparedness for COVID-19, and will continue to communicate with providers as the situation evolves.

In relation to the 2020 influenza season, which approaches while the COVID-19 outbreak evolves, I want to emphasise that vaccination for all residents, staff, and volunteers working in aged care homes is particularly important this year to protect staff and residents from influenza. All people aged 65 years and over are eligible for the free influenza vaccine under the National Immunisation Program (available from April 2020). I will write to you again in the coming weeks in relation to preparation for the 2020 influenza season.

Yours sincerely



Professor Brendan Murphy  
Chief Medical Officer  
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