



FACT SHEET:

ADVICE FOR RETIREMENT VILLAGES

28 March 2020

This factsheet is for information and advice for Australians living or working in retirement villages. It may be useful for any facilities where older Australians live or stay, such as residential parks, land lease communities or lifestyle villages. It outlines the COVID-19 facts and the measures you can take to protect yourself and older Australians.

We will update this fact sheet when new information comes to hand at www.health.gov.au

Older people (more than 60 years of age, or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples more than 50 years of age) are more susceptible to getting sick with coronavirus. The risk of serious illness and, in some reported cases death, increases with age, particularly people who have chronic illnesses or who may have a weakened immune system.

We suggest you also view our advice for older people at www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert/advice-for-people-at-risk-of-coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-for-older-people

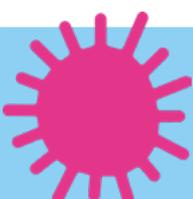
What is COVID-19 (coronavirus)?

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that cause respiratory infections. These can range from the common cold to more serious diseases. COVID-19 is the disease caused by a new coronavirus. It was first reported in December 2019 in Wuhan City in China. It has now become a global pandemic.

How is it spread?

The virus can spread from person to person through:

- close contact with an infectious person (including in the 24 hours before they started showing symptoms)
- contact with droplets from an infected person coughing or sneezing
- touching objects or surfaces (like doorknobs or tables) that have droplets on them from an infected person, and then touching your mouth or face.



What are the symptoms?

The symptoms of COVID-19 are similar to colds and flus and can include:

- Fever
- Sore throat
- Cough
- Shortness of breath
- Fatigue

People living with dementia or some form of cognitive impairment, may not be able to describe their symptoms or express pain or discomfort.

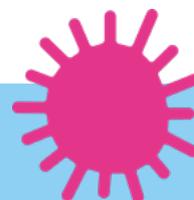
While the COVID-19 virus is of serious concern, it is important to remember, at this stage, that most people displaying symptoms such as fever, cough, sore throat or fatigue may be suffering from a cold, flu, allergies or other respiratory illness – not COVID-19.

Do people need to be tested if they have these symptoms?

Your doctor will tell you if you should be tested. They will arrange for the test.

You will only be tested if your doctor decides you meet one of the below criteria:

- You have returned from overseas in the past 14 days and you develop respiratory illness or fever
- You have been in close contact with a confirmed or probable COVID-19 case in the past 14 days and you develop respiratory illness or fever
- You have been on a cruise ship in the past 14 days and you develop respiratory illness or fever
- You are in a higher risk environment (aged care facility, military operational setting, boarding school, correctional facility, detention facility, aboriginal rural and remote community) where there have been two or more cases of COVID-19, and you develop a respiratory illness or fever
- You have been in a setting which public health units have identified as an outbreak and you develop respiratory illness or fever
- You are in an area that public health units have identified as being at elevated risk of community transmission and you develop respiratory illness or fever
- You have been in an area where there has been an outbreak of COVID-19 and you develop respiratory illness or fever
- You are a health care worker, aged or residential care worker and you develop respiratory illness or fever

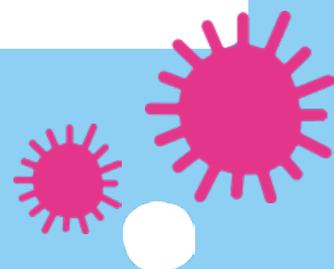


- You are in hospital with acute respiratory symptoms and fever and there is no other clear cause

There is a global shortage of the test kits that pathologists use to diagnose COVID-19. This is why we are doing targeted testing instead of widespread testing.

Why is this virus so dangerous for older people?

The risk of serious illness from COVID-19 increases with age. The highest rate of fatalities is among older people, particularly those with other serious health conditions or a weakened immune system. There is currently no cure or vaccine for COVID-19, or immunity in the community.



FOR RESIDENTS

What can I do to protect myself at home?

Even if you are feeling well, it is important to take steps to prevent the spread of this virus. Good hygiene and taking care when interacting with other people are the best defence for you and your family against COVID-19.

This includes:

- covering your coughs and sneezes with your elbow or a tissue
- disposing of tissues immediately they are used, into a dedicated waste bin, and washing your hands
- washing your hands often with soap and water, including before and after eating and after going to the toilet, and when you have been out to shops or other places
- using alcohol-based hand sanitisers, where available
- cleaning and disinfecting surfaces you have touched
- where possible, stay 1.5 metres away from other people as an example of “social distancing”
- if you are sick, avoiding contact with others.

If you start to feel unwell with symptoms of COVID-19, phone the National Coronavirus Helpline on **1800 020 080** or your GP who will be able to provide you with further advice.

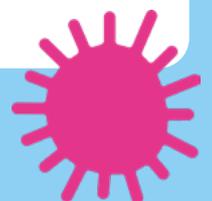
Older people aged over 70 (or over 50 for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples) or people with chronic conditions are able to seek medical support from their GPs through bulk-billed telehealth (videolink) and telephone services. Examples of possible video applications include FaceTime and Skype.

Medical practitioners must be satisfied that the services they use to video link with their patients meet current standards and laws regarding privacy and information security.

Can I still have contact with friends and family?

The Australian Government is requiring everyone to practise social distancing, which means less contact between you and other people to help slow the spread of the disease. You should limit physical contact with other people, especially young children, and avoid large groups of people. Limit your visitors to one or two people per day, and limit the duration of visits. This will help protect you and help stop the spread of disease.

It's possible that children and young people may be carriers of COVID-19 but show no symptoms, making it extremely difficult to tell if it's safe for them to visit an older relative.



These measures may be stressful for you and your loved ones. You can keep in touch via phone and video calls, send postcards, photos or artwork, or film short videos to share.

If you regularly visit someone living with a cognitive impairment, consider other ways of maintaining social contact will help reassure individuals who may feel anxious about possible changes to their day to day life. You can also contact the National Dementia Helpline on **1800 100 500**.

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

How can your family and friends help you and other older people?

They should regularly check in with you, and see how they might help you. A simple trip to the supermarket or pharmacy on your behalf is a practical way to help you.

Continued and regular communication will be important. Friends and family can help you to keep in touch by enabling you to use mobile phones, and video call systems, such as Skype or FaceTime.

Can I leave my home for exercise or other outdoor activities?

Maintaining a good diet and exercise routine is important for your wellbeing and mental health, particularly during this challenging time.

Exercise regularly at home. Options could include exercise DVDs, dancing, floor exercises, yoga, walking around the backyard or using home exercise equipment.

You can leave your house to go for a walk or exercise outdoors if you are well and you stay away from other people.



FOR RETIREMENT VILLAGE OPERATORS

How can the facility protect residents and workers?

To reduce the spread of COVID-19, the Australian Government has introduced restrictions on non-essential services and group gatherings. In order to comply with these restrictions and public health orders of each state, services and events offered by retirement villages or other facilities will need to change.

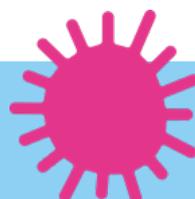
These include:

- Adjusting visits to common areas such as games rooms, common sitting areas and outdoor barbeque areas to comply with one person per four square metres ruling
- Limiting gatherings in outdoor areas such as barbeque facilities to less than 10 people
- Closing shared facilities such as dining halls, swimming pools, tennis courts, gyms and libraries
- Introducing a delivery service or takeaway for meal services
- Hosting meetings held by the resident committees, residents and operators via distance such as video or teleconferencing.

There are a number of other measures that retirement village operators can take to better protect its residents and workers.

These include:

- Encourage social distancing where possible, which means maintaining a distance of 1.5 metres from other people.
- Provide information and brief all workers, including domestic and cleaning staff, on relevant information and procedures to prevent the spread of coronavirus.
- Make phone or video calls accessible to all people living in the village where possible, to enable regular communication with family members. Family and friends should be encouraged to maintain contact with residents by phone and other social communication apps, as appropriate.
- Provide clear information to residents and families regarding cough/sneeze etiquette, hand hygiene; and what to do if they have any symptoms of COVID-19 or another respiratory illness (e.g. fever, cough, shortness of breath, cough, sore throat).
- Advise all visitors and staff to monitor themselves for symptoms of respiratory illness and to stay away from the village while they are unwell. Visitors and staff must not enter the village if they have been diagnosed with COVID-19 until they have ended their period of isolation.



When should workers stay home?

If a worker has a confirmed case of COVID-19, they will not be allowed to work.

It is important that workers stay at home and seek medical advice if they are unwell.

Everyone must stay at home (self-isolation) for 14 days and alert their employer if:

- they have returned from overseas in the last 14 days
- they have been in close contact with someone diagnosed with COVID-19
- Workers who have a fever, or any symptoms of respiratory illness (e.g. cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, runny nose or nasal congestion) should stay home.

If a worker is unwell, they should phone their doctor for advice.

Should workers be wearing a mask at work?

Workers in retirement villages do not need to wear a mask if they are well.

They may need to wear a mask if they are needing to be in close contact with a resident who is unwell with respiratory symptoms and the unwell resident cannot wear a mask.

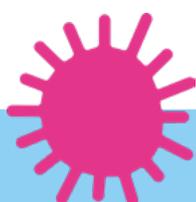
What should my staff be doing differently at work?

A new online training module providing information on COVID-19 infection control has been released by the Government. This includes signs and symptoms of the virus, how to keep safe and myth busting. A specific training program for aged care workers is being developed and may have relevant information for you and your facility. The training offers practical information on how to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and measures to take when visitors attend, which could be of relevance to your facility. Go to: www.covid-19training.gov.au

Can food and water spread coronavirus?

Some coronaviruses can potentially survive in the gastrointestinal tract. However, food-borne spread is unlikely when food is properly cooked and prepared. With good food preparation and good hand hygiene, it is highly unlikely that people will become infected with coronavirus through food.

Drinking water in Australia is high quality and is well treated. It is not anticipated that drinking water will be affected by coronavirus.



More information

For the latest advice, information and resources, go to www.health.gov.au or www.healthdirect.gov.au/coronavirus

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

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

For further information please contact:

- OPAN at www.opan.com.au or call **1800 700 600**
- COTA at www.cota.org.au or speak to your state or territory COTA representative www.cota.org.au/get-involved/visit-stateor-territory-cota
- National Seniors Australia at <https://nationalseniors.com.au> or call **1300 765 050**
- Housing for the Aged Action Group (HAAG) www.older tenants.org.au/corona-virus-response-updates
- Dementia Australia at www.dementia.org.au or call **1800 100 500**.

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

