

FACT SHEET:

Coronavirus
(COVID-19)

FOR RESIDENTIAL AGED CARE FACILITY WORKERS

Our health care and residential aged care workers are at the frontline of protecting older Australians from COVID-19. It is crucial that we support and protect them.

This information sheet should be read in conjunction with the 'What you need to know' and 'Isolation guidance' information sheets found at www.health.gov.au/covid19-resources.

V1, 19 March 2020

People who have returned from anywhere overseas, or have been in contact with someone confirmed to have COVID-19, are required to self-isolate for 14 days. If you develop symptoms including a fever and cough, you should seek medical attention immediately.

CAN I GO TO WORK?

Yes, it is safe to go to work as you normally would. However, to keep residents safe you must not go to work and stay at home (self-isolate), and alert your employer if:

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

Staff must receive the 2020 influenza vaccination by 1 May 2020 to work in or visit an aged care facility.

HOW CAN I HELP PREVENT THE SPREAD OF CORONAVIRUS?

There is currently no vaccination to prevent COVID-19. Avoiding exposure is the single most important way to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in residential aged care facilities.

You must ensure that you:

- Practise and encourage good hand hygiene and good cough/sneeze etiquette.
- Depending on anticipated exposure, wear appropriate personal protective equipment.
- Maintain a distance of 1.5 metres from visitors, and encourage residents to do the same.

HOW DO I KNOW WHAT I SHOULD 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 module for aged care workers will follow.





HOW WILL THE FACILITY PROTECT RESIDENTS AND WORKERS?

The Australian Government has put in place restrictions on visits in order to protect residents and workers in residential aged care facilities. Care providers understand the difficulty that these new arrangements will pose for families and should manage cases compassionately especially when it relates to end-of-life situations, palliative care and dementia units.

To protect resident and workers, the following visiting restrictions are in place:

- Visits will be limited to a short duration.
- Visits will be limited to a maximum of two visitors at a time. These may be immediate social supports (family members, close friends) or professional service or advocacy.
- Visits by children 16 years and under are not permitted except in special circumstances, as they are generally unable to comply with hygiene measures. Exemptions can be assessed on a case-by-case basis, for example, where the resident is in palliative care.
- Visits will be conducted in a resident's room, outdoors, or in a specific area designated by the facility, rather than communal areas where the risk of transmission to residents is greater.
- No large group visits or gatherings, including social activities or entertainment, will be permitted.
- No school groups of any size are allowed to visit.

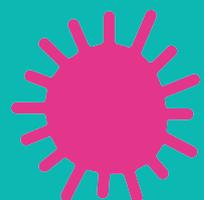
Visitors must be encouraged to practise social distancing where possible, which means maintaining a distance of 1.5 metres from other people.

Facilities should make phone or video calls accessible to all residents 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.

Clear information should be provided 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).

Aged care facilities should advise all visitors and staff to monitor themselves for symptoms of respiratory illness and to stay away from the facility while they are unwell. Visitors and staff must not enter the facility if they have been diagnosed with COVID-19 until they have ended their isolation.

Your employer should provide you with clear policy and procedures that will guide you on how you should care for someone who may have COVID-19 symptoms or a person's health deteriorates. If you have any questions or concerns, please discuss them with your manager.





WHAT ABOUT WORKERS WITH VISA WORK RESTRICTIONS?

New visa arrangements are available now to support the aged care workforce. Aged care providers can now temporarily offer more hours to international students to help ensure the care of older Australians.

These changes apply to both residential and home care.

They are temporary measures and are designed to address any staff shortages caused by COVID-19. We need to support workforce continuity in case a large part of the workforce is unable to come to work. Providers will ensure all staff are adequately trained. For more information, visit www.homeaffairs.gov.au.

WILL I HAVE ACCESS TO GOVERNMENT PAYMENTS IF I CAN'T GO TO WORK?

Workers who are unable to attend work because they have been diagnosed with COVID-19 or who are in isolation may qualify for Sickness Allowance (or JobSeeker Payment from 20 March 2020) if they do not have any employer leave entitlements, such as sick leave, and they meet general eligibility requirements in respect of residency and income and asset tests.

Young people under the age of 22 who are unable to attend work because they have been diagnosed with COVID-19 or who are in isolation may qualify for Youth Allowance if they meet the same requirements. For more information, visit Services Australia www.servicesaustralia.gov.au.

WHAT PRECAUTIONS DO I NEED TO TAKE?

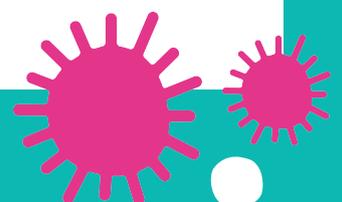
Standard precautions for preventing infection are always used in care settings, and must be used in aged care facilities when providing health care or personal care. Standard precautions include hand hygiene before and after every episode of resident contact, using, appropriate PPE (including gloves, gown, appropriate mask and eye protection) depending on the anticipated exposure, ensuring good sneeze-cough etiquette and regularly cleaning the environment and equipment.

Additional precautions must be taken when caring for a resident with COVID-19. These are outlined in the COVID-19 guidelines for outbreaks in residential care facilities here, www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidelines-for-outbreaks-in-residential-care-facilities.

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 you 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

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

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.

If you, a family member or friend needs crisis support, please call Lifeline on 13 11 14.

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.

