



FAQS

Flu Vaccination requirements for aged care facilities

23 June 2020

Each state and territory has directions about entering residential aged care facilities. The directions give effect to the recommendations of the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee, endorsed by the National Cabinet.

Residential aged care providers and visitors to aged care facilities must remain up-to-date with their state or territory directions. You can find this information on your state or territory website. Contact your relevant state or territory government for advice on how this applies to you.

The directions are available on the following websites:

- New South Wales
- Victoria
- Queensland
- South Australia
- Western Australia
- [Tasmania](#)
- Australian Capital Territory
- Northern Territory

Flu vaccinations

The annual influenza (flu) vaccine for 2020 is now available. It is most important this year with the COVID-19 global pandemic. Cases of the flu can increase the burden on the health system.

While the flu vaccine cannot protect against COVID-19, you can become ill with the flu and COVID-19 together. This may cause severe outcomes, including hospitalisation.

Will all visitors need to be vaccinated?

In most states and territories, entry to residential aged care facilities is restricted to people who have had a current flu vaccination. This applies to:

- staff
- visitors
- health practitioners
- volunteers, and
- other people entering the facility (e.g. cleaners, tradesman, gardeners and maintenance staff).

On 22 July 2020, Victoria issued *Care Facilities Direction No. 8* which removed the requirement for workers and visitors to have an up to date vaccination against influenza to enter a residential aged care facility. This is part of the Victorian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic at a local level.

What happens if staff are not able to be vaccinated?

The only absolute contraindications to flu vaccines are:

- anaphylaxis after a previous flu vaccine
- anaphylaxis after any part of a flu vaccine

The [Australian Immunisation Handbook provides](#) details about other health conditions that indicate caution in receiving flu vaccine. Health providers should refer to this before providing a written recommendation that a staff member should not be vaccinated.

Staff members with written medical advice that they are not able to be vaccinated should:

- wear a surgical mask while at work during the flu season.
- if possible review their work duties to avoid close contact with residents.

Staff members should never attend work if unwell with any respiratory symptom.

Do residential aged care providers need to provide free flu vaccinations to staff and volunteers?

Yes. All Australian Government subsidised residential aged care providers must offer staff and volunteers free access to annual flu vaccinations. This is at the provider's cost.

What should residential aged care workers do if they experience symptoms after getting the flu vaccine?

Some people who receive the flu vaccine will experience fever and lethargy as a side effect. However, this is unusual in adults. If caused by the vaccine, it is usually mild and short-lived. Fever and lethargy are also common symptoms of COVID-19 and could be an early indication of infection.

Health and aged care workers with cold and flu-like symptoms must **not** work while unwell. If unwell with any of the following symptoms workers must quarantine and get tested for COVID-19:

- respiratory symptoms (e.g. cough, shortness of breath, sore throat)
- a fever or a history of fever (e.g. night sweats, chills)
- other symptoms such as loss of taste and loss of smell

Stay home until you receive your test results. Notify your employer that you are unwell and are in quarantine.

If your result is negative, remain at home until you are well enough to return to work. Keep your employer updated on your health status.

If you return a positive test result for COVID-19, follow the advice of your doctor. You must isolate in either your home or in a hospital. You cannot return to work until health authorities advise it is safe for you to do so. .

What are aged care providers' obligations regarding entry into residential aged care facilities?

Under state and territory directions, aged care providers must ensure prohibited people:

- do not enter
- do not remain in

the aged care facility.

Will aged care providers ask a visitor or worker to prove they are vaccinated?

Yes. Aged care providers must sight **appropriate evidence of immunisation status** from visitors and workers.

Appropriate evidence may be:

- a statement or record from a health practitioner
- an immunisation history statement available from Medicare online
- the Express Plus Medicare mobile app

Aged care providers in all states and territories except Victoria, must take all reasonable steps to ensure visitors who do not meet the requirements do not enter the facility.

Aged care providers may ask to see evidence from a worker, or rely on the employer's assurance. For example, employers may include:

- a State Government body that employs emergency services workers (such as ambulance drivers or paramedics); or
- an employment agency for temporary agency staff

How is compliance assessed?

State and territory law enforcement agencies will enforce these directions. Persons who fail to comply with any of the directions may face penalties. These include fines for individuals and for bodies corporate.

Will residents still have the right to refuse vaccination?

Yes, residents have the right to refuse vaccinations. The flu vaccination requirements do not apply to residents of an aged care facility.

Who can administer a flu vaccination?

A doctor, nurse or Aboriginal health worker can give flu vaccinations.

In some situations, authorised pharmacists can also give flu vaccinations. All health professionals must practise in accordance with state/territory legislation and relevant policy.

Who should aged care providers, visitors and workers contact if they have concerns or questions?

Aged care providers and individuals should contact their local state or territory government for more information.