



FACT SHEET WORKERS IN RESIDENTIAL AGED CARE FACILITIES

05/08/2020

Our residential aged care workers are at the frontline of protecting older Australians from COVID-19. We want to support and protect you.

In addition to this information sheet, you can find out more at:

- [What you need to know about COVID-19](#)
- [How to protect yourself and others from COVID-19](#)
- [Using personal protective equipment](#)
- [Support during an outbreak](#)
- [Translated COVID-19 resources](#)

Why do we need to protect older Australians?

Some people are at greater risk of more serious illness if they get COVID-19. Risk of severe disease death increases as people age and there is a very substantial increase in risk of severe COVID-19 illness in people over 70.

Some medical conditions may also increase risk. People at high risk of severe COVID-19 illness include those who:

- have had an organ transplants and on immune suppressive therapy
- have had a bone marrow transplants in the last 24 months or are on immune suppressive therapy for graft versus host disease
- have a haematologic (blood) cancer e.g. leukaemia, lymphoma or myelodysplastic syndrome (diagnosed within the last 5 years)
- are having chemotherapy or radiotherapy

For people living with dementia or some form of cognitive impairment, the ability to alert others about potential symptoms may be a challenge. This is especially so where there is a limited capacity to communicate verbally or express pain and discomfort.

Can you go to work?

As a Residential Aged Care Facility worker you are providing an essential service to some of our most vulnerable Australians. It is vitally important that you provide continuity of service during this unprecedented time.

What can you do to protect older people?

You should not go to work if you feel unwell, even if you only have mild symptoms, and you should get tested. This will protect residents, other workers and the broader community.

You should also not go to work if you have been in contact with someone with COVID-19, unless you were wearing personal protective equipment. Tell your employer if you have been as well.

If you have recently been in an area of increased transmission and need to quarantine (for locations of increased transmission check with your local or state public health unit), or if you are considered to be at greater risk to more serious infection, you should talk with your employer about how to manage your risk at work.

How can you help stop the spread of COVID-19?

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.

To protect yourself and those in your care you must:

- Cover your cough or sneeze with your elbow or a tissue. Sanitise your hands afterwards.
- Wash or sanitise your hands regularly, including before and after touching a resident.
- If you are not undertaking direct care duties, stay 1.5 metres from residents and instruct visitors to do the same.
- Wear PPE when needed.

Additional precautions will be necessary if there is a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 in your care facility.

For further information on how you can protect yourself and those in your care you are should complete the [COVID-19 training](#).

This training includes an infection prevention and control training module for health care workers in all settings, as well as aged care specific training.

If you are having trouble and can't access the aged care specific training, email support@covid-19training.gov.au for a priority response.

When should you be tested for COVID-19?

We need to find health and aged care workers with COVID-19 as early as possible.

You should be tested for COVID-19 if you develop symptoms including:

- fever
- sore throat
- headache
- shortness of breath
- muscle aches
- cough
- runny nose

If you are sick but not with these symptoms, you should talk to your doctor about whether you need to be tested.

Your doctor will tell you if you need to be tested and will arrange the test.

Aged and residential care facilities are high-risk-settings. This means the virus can spread quickly between residents and staff. Residents and staff will be tested (even if they don't feel sick) if there is a confirmed or suspected case of COVID-19 in a facility.

What about influenza vaccinations?

From 1 May 2020, all staff, visiting workers and visitors to residential aged care facilities must be vaccinated against influenza (the flu).

The Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) announced this requirement on 21 April 2020.

More information is available in the FAQs:

[Restrictions on entry into and visitors to aged care facilities](#)

What about workers with visa work restrictions?

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

These changes apply to both residential and home care.

They are temporary measures and are designed to address staff shortages caused by COVID-19. We need to support workforce continuity across the aged care sector in case a large part of the workforce are unable to come to work. Providers will need to ensure all staff are adequately trained.

For further information about this temporary measure and what you need to do to access these new arrangements, contact the Department of Home Affairs on **131 881** or email SVCR@homeaffairs.gov.au

Will I have access to additional Government payments?

The Australian Government is providing more funding to support aged care providers and workers temporarily.

One payment is called the 'retention bonus' and it is a bonus payment for residential care workers. You may be eligible for this bonus. For more information read the [retention bonus fact sheet](#).

If you can't work because you have COVID-19 or you're in isolation, you may qualify for the Sickness Allowance (or JobSeeker Payment). You may get these payments if you don't have any employer leave entitlements, such as sick leave. You need to check if you are eligible for the payment.

If you are under the age of 22 and can't work because you have COVID-19 or you're in isolation, may get Youth Allowance. You need to check if you are eligible for the payment.

For more information, visit Services Australia www.servicesaustralia.gov.au

Can food spread coronavirus?

Some coronaviruses can survive in the gastrointestinal tract. However, the virus spreading through food is unlikely if it is prepared and cooked properly. Good food preparation and good hand hygiene will help protect both yourself and those in your care from COVID-19.

More information

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

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

The [COVIDSafe](#) app speeds up contacting people who have been exposed to COVID-19.

You can call your [state or territory public health agency](#).

Support to protect your mental health and wellbeing as a healthcare worker: beyondblue.org.au or **1800 512 348**.

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