



FACT SHEET: ADVICE FOR RETIREMENT VILLAGES

26/08/2020

This fact sheet provides information and advice for Australians living or working in retirement villages. It covers the COVID-19 facts and the steps you can take to protect yourself and older Australians. It may be useful for any facilities where older Australians live or stay, including residential parks, land lease communities or lifestyle villages.

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

The people most at risk of serious illness, and in some cases death, from COVID-19 are:

- aged 70 years and over
- aged 65 years and over with chronic medical conditions
- Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander aged 50 years and over with chronic medical conditions
- people with weakened immune systems.

For more information please read our advice for people with chronic health conditions [webpage](#).

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 (SARS-CoV-2). It was first reported in December 2019 in Wuhan City in China. It has now become a global pandemic.

How is it spread?

The infection can spread from person to person through:

- direct contact with droplets from an infected person coughing or sneezing
- touching objects or surfaces (like doorknobs or tables) with droplets on them from an infected person, and then touching your eyes, nose or mouth.

People with COVID-19 are infectious from approximately 48 hours before they get symptoms.

What are the symptoms?

The symptoms of COVID-19 are similar to colds and influenza (flu). They can range from mild to severe and include:

- fever
- cough
- sore throat
- tiredness
- difficulty breathing
- headache
- muscle pain (myalgia)
- joint pain
- loss of sense of smell (anosmia)
- distortion of sense of taste (dysgeusia)
- vomiting
- diarrhoea.

Most people with COVID-19 experience a mild to moderate respiratory illness.

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

Do people need a test if they have these symptoms?

Anyone with cold or flu-like symptoms, even if mild, should get tested. Your doctor will tell you if you need a test and advise you how to arrange the test. People with mild symptoms can still spread the virus. To help stop the spread of COVID-19, anyone with cold and flu-like symptoms should get tested.

You can:

- attend a free COVID-19 respiratory clinic
- contact your doctor and they will arrange the test, this may attract a fee.

COVID-19 respiratory clinics focus on testing and providing health advice to people with respiratory infections. They are located around the country.

Find the [COVID-19 respiratory clinic](#) nearest to you.

If your symptoms are serious, you should seek urgent medical attention. If possible, call ahead so the medical facility can prepare.

Why do we need to take particular care to protect older Australians?

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

People living with dementia or some form of cognitive impairment may find it difficult to:

- follow instructions to reduce their risk of getting COVID-19
- tell others if they have symptoms.

This can be more difficult if they have trouble communicating verbally or expressing pain and discomfort.

To protect older Australians and people with weakened immune systems from COVID-19 we all need to work together.

Do I need to have the flu vaccine and does this stop COVID-19?

It is important to have a flu vaccination every year to protect yourself and others. Older Australians are at risk of becoming seriously ill from flu. Flu vaccination is recommended for:

- older Australians
- family and friends of older Australians
- anyone working with older people, including in retirement villages.

Flu vaccination does not prevent COVID-19. It is important to protect the community from flu and avoid placing additional burden on the healthcare system. It also reduces the chance of someone having COVID-19 and flu at the same time.

WHAT IS THE COVIDSAFE APP?

The COVIDSafe app is part of our work to slow the spread of COVID-19. It helps public health authorities to find people who have been exposed to the virus more quickly. This helps to quickly contain outbreaks and prevent further spread.

The COVIDSafe app is completely voluntary. Downloading the app onto your mobile phone is something you can do to protect your family and friends. It can help save the lives of other Australians. The more Australians with the COVIDSafe app, the quicker we can find the virus.

For more information about this app, including to how download it, see our [COVIDSafe app](#) page. If you still have questions you can call the **National Coronavirus Helpline** on **1800 020 080**. The line operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

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. You should practise good hygiene and taking care when interacting with other people. These are the best defences for you and your family against COVID-19.

This includes:

- covering your mouth and nose when you cough and sneeze with your elbow or a tissue
- disposing of tissues as soon as they are used, into a bin, and washing your hands
- washing your hands often with soap and water. This includes before and after eating, after going to the toilet, and when you have been out in public
- wearing a face mask as an extra precaution or if recommended or required in your area
- not touching your face, including your eyes
- using alcohol-based hand sanitisers, where available
- cleaning and disinfecting surfaces you touch often such as benchtops, desks and doorknobs
- cleaning and disinfecting objects you use often such as mobile phones, keys and wallets
- increasing the amount of fresh air by opening windows or adjusting air conditioning to fresh rather than recycled
- staying 1.5 metres away from other people (“physical distancing”)
- if you are sick, avoiding contact with others.

If you start to feel unwell with cold or flu-like symptoms seek further advice. Phone:

- the **National Coronavirus Helpline** on **1800 020 080**
- your GP.

All Australians can now access Medicare-subsidised telehealth services from their GP and some other health care providers. They will talk to you either by video links such as FaceTime and Skype, or by phone.

Pharmacies can home deliver PBS and Repatriation Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme medications. They may provide a continuing supply of your usual medications without a prescription if you can't consult your GP. For more information phone your GP or your local pharmacy.

CAN I STILL SEE FRIENDS, FAMILY AND CARERS?

Yes, but there may be some restrictions.

Each state and territory is deciding when and how to ease or in some instances re-establish restrictions, considering local circumstances.

Relevant state and territory advice is available here:

- New South Wales — nsw.gov.au/covid-19
- Victoria — dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus
- Queensland — covid19.qld.gov.au
- South Australia — covid-19.sa.gov.au
- Western Australia — wa.gov.au/government/covid-19-coronavirus
- Tasmania — coronavirus.tas.gov.au
- Australian Capital Territory — covid19.act.gov.au
- Northern Territory — coronavirus.nt.gov.au

The current risk of becoming infected depends on where you live. If there are no or few cases and no evidence of community transmission in your area, the risk of exposure is low regardless of your age. However, in places where there are higher rates of community transmission – like metropolitan Melbourne and some areas of Sydney – the risk is higher.

Everybody has a personal responsibility to protect themselves, their loved ones and the wider community. If you're thinking about returning to normal activities there are some things you must consider:

- your individual risk of severe disease
- the level of transmission where you live and travel
- what activities are most important to you and how they can be done safely
- whether and when you're comfortable to do these things and when you're not.

You can find out more by reading our [Living well in the COVID-19 pandemic fact sheet](#). This will help you to make COVIDSafe decisions about work, transport, and social activities in the COVID-19 pandemic. We also have a [COVID-19 action plan](#) that you can complete to help you manage your risk related to COVID-19. You may like to complete this with your doctor.

Some higher-risk settings – like residential aged care facilities – will have higher levels of protection.

People who assist you by providing essential care should continue to do so. This includes nursing care, home care, or respite care as well as family members who may provide care for you.

If friends and family do visit you, or you go out with them, ask them to:

- not visit if they are unwell
- wear a face mask as recommended or required in your area
- wash their hands, or use alcohol-based hand sanitiser, when they arrive
- stay 1.5m away from you when possible.

What if I am unable to see family and friends in person?

It is important to stay in touch with your family and friends if you can't see them in person. Great ways to stay connected include using:

- phone calls
- video chats through programs like FaceTime and Skype
- emails.

Reaching out to family, friends and neighbours is as important for your health as protecting yourself from coronavirus.

The Australian Government is providing extra funding to the **Community Visitors Scheme** (CVS). The CVS is a free service aiming to provide friendship and companionship to older people receiving aged care services. The CVS is a service that helps people develop social connections.

To find out how you can access the CVS, you can:

- speak to your facility
- contact **My Aged Care** by phoning **1800 200 422** or log on to www.myagedcare.gov.au

The Australian Government has also funded a new Older Persons COVID-19 Support Line. This phone line is to help support senior Australians, their families and carers. You can call the **Older Persons COVID-19 Support Line** on **1800 171 866** Monday to Friday.

If you often visit someone living with dementia, or another cognitive impairment, consider other ways of staying in contact. This will help reassure people 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 more support contact:

- Beyond Blue 1300 224 636
- Lifeline 13 11 14.

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

Ask them to regularly check in with you and see how they can help you. A simple trip to the supermarket or pharmacy on your behalf is a practical way to help.

Regular communication is important. Friends and family can keep in touch by phone, and video call systems, such as Skype or FaceTime.

Can my care worker or carer still visit me and provide my care?

Yes, so long as they are well.

Care workers and carers should not visit you if they are unwell, even if their symptoms are mild. If they are unwell, they will arrange for someone else to provide you with your usual care.

You and your care worker or carer may need to wear a mask or other personal protective equipment (PPE). More information is available, including a video and a flowchart about wearing PPE in aged care at [health.gov.au](https://www.health.gov.au).

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.

You should continue to exercise regularly, even if you are unable or choose not to leave home. Options could include exercise DVDs, dancing, floor exercises, yoga, walking around the backyard, gardening or using home exercise equipment.

You can leave your house to go for a walk or exercise outdoors if you are well. You may be able to exercise with other people, maintaining 1.5m distance between people and perhaps wearing a mask. It is always important to check your state or territory's specific restrictions and advice. This may vary between jurisdictions.

FOR RETIREMENT VILLAGE OPERATORS

How can the facility protect residents and workers?

You will need to comply with requirements and public health orders in your state or territory. Services and events offered by retirement villages or other facilities may need to change. This will depend on the requirements at the time in your area. These could include:

- Adjusting visits to common areas such as games rooms, common sitting areas and outdoor barbeque areas
- Introducing a delivery service or takeaway meal services
- Hosting meetings of the resident committee, residents and operators in another way. This could be via distance such as, spacing chairs at 1.5m apart or using video or teleconferencing
- Closing or limiting use of shared facilities. This could include public BBQ facilities, dining halls, swimming pools, tennis courts, gyms and libraries
- Ensuring staff and residents wear a face mask.

For more information about restrictions in your state or territory, go to:

- ACT — covid19.act.gov.au
- NSW — nsw.gov.au/covid-19
- NT — coronavirus.nt.gov.au
- Qld — covid19.qld.gov.au
- SA — covid-19.sa.gov.au
- TAS — coronavirus.tas.gov.au
- VIC — dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus
- WA — wa.gov.au/government/covid-19-coronavirus

There are other things retirement village operators can do to protect residents and workers. These include:

- Encourage physical distancing where possible, which means maintaining a distance of 1.5 metres from other people
- Provide information on COVID-19 and procedures to prevent its spread. Brief all workers, including domestic and cleaning staff
- Allow family and friends to visit where regulations permit
- Make phone or video calls accessible to all people living in the village where possible. This will enable regular communication with family members if visiting is not possible. Encourage the use of phone and other social communication apps, as appropriate

- Provide clear information to residents and families about cough/sneeze etiquette and hand hygiene. Let them know what to do if they have any cold or flu-like symptoms. This could include fever, cough, shortness of breath, cough, or sore throat
- Make hand sanitiser available in entrances and common areas
- Advise all visitors and staff to monitor themselves for symptoms of respiratory illness. Remind them to stay away from the village while they are unwell. Visitors and staff diagnosed with COVID-19 must not enter the village until they have ended their period of isolation.

When should workers stay home?

Workers should not attend work if they are unwell, even if their symptoms are mild.

They should stay at home and seek medical advice, including advice about whether they should be tested for COVID-19.

Everyone must quarantine for 14 days and alert their employer if they have been in close contact with someone diagnosed with COVID-19

A worker with COVID-19, must not return to work until their doctor says they can.

A worker with cold and flu-like symptoms and a negative test for COVID-19, should not return to work until they are well. If a worker has a chronic respiratory illness, they should seek medical advice about when they can return to work. They should talk about whether they are at higher risk of serious illness from COVID-19. If they are, they should talk about how to protect themselves at work.

What if a resident or staff member tests positive?

You should contact and seek advice from your state or territory public health unit as soon as you find out.

Should workers be wearing a mask at work?

Workers in retirement villages need to wear a mask if they are providing care for:

- residents with respiratory symptoms
- residents who have suspected or confirmed COVID-19
- as required or recommended in their state or territory.

Workers who need to be in close contact with a resident who is unwell with respiratory symptoms should wear a surgical mask at a minimum. They may also need to wear other personal protective equipment such as goggles, gown and gloves.

All workers should ensure they:

- Practise and encourage good hand hygiene and good
- cough/sneeze etiquette
- Stay 1.5 metres away from residents whenever possible and instruct visitors to do the same
- Wear a mask if required or recommended in their state or territory
- Use standard precautions to prevent infection in all residents at all times. This includes hand hygiene before and after every episode of physical contact.

Additional precautions will be necessary if there is a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 in your retirement village or in a co-located residential aged care facility. You should contact your local public health unit for advice if there is a suspected or confirmed case in your village or a co-located residential aged care facility.

What should my staff be doing differently at work?

An online training module on COVID-19 infection control is available. This includes signs and symptoms of the virus, how to keep safe and myth busting. A specific training program for aged care workers with nine modules may be helpful for you and your facility. The modules are:

- Personal safety
- Families and visitors
- COVID-19 and aged care
- Outbreak management procedures
- Personal protective equipment
- Laundry
- Cleaning
- If you suspect a person has Coronavirus
- Supporting older Australians in residential and home care.

The training offers practical information on how to prevent the spread of COVID-19 which could be relevant to your facility. Go to: <http://www.covid-19training.gov.au/>.

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:

- **COTA** at www.cota.org.au or speak to your [state or territory COTA representative](#)
- **National Seniors Australia** at nationalseniors.com.au or call **1300 765 050**
- Housing for the Aged Action Group (HAAG) oldertenants.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.