



COVID-19: SEEING FAMILY AND FRIENDS AND LIVING IN THE COMMUNITY – FACT SHEET FOR OLDER AUSTRALIANS

7 September 2020

Can I meet with friends and family and go out in the community?

Governments across Australia are moving forward with the [3-step COVIDSafe plan according to their situations](#). The plan provides a pathway for states and territories to create COVIDSafe communities in a way that suits their circumstances.

The Australian Government continues to recommend that vulnerable people consider their personal risk and circumstances. Some people are at higher risk of serious illness from coronavirus. This includes people who:

- are aged 70 years or over
- are aged 65 years or over and have a chronic medical condition
- are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, aged 50 years with a chronic medical condition
- have a weakened immune system.

For more information about who is at higher risk visit the [advice for people at risk webpage](#).

Under the plan, each state and territory will decide when and how to ease, or in some instances, re-establish restrictions, considering their local circumstances. Look to local authorities for the most current information, or visit www.australia.gov.au to link to state and territory resources.

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 to a large extent 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. However, in places where there are high rates of community transmission, 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 you can do them 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.

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 ask them to:

- wash their hands, or use alcohol-based hand sanitiser, when they arrive
- stay 1.5m away from you when possible
- wear a face mask as recommended or required in your area.

Should I be wearing a mask?

Wearing a mask can help protect you and those around you in an area with community transmission and where physical distancing is not possible.

Face masks are required or recommended in some areas. Check your state or territory health website for up-to-date advice on whether you need to wear a mask.

While a mask is an extra precaution, you must continue to:

- stay at home if unwell
- maintain physical distance (more than 1.5m) from other people, when out

- avoid large gatherings and crowded indoor spaces
- practise hand and respiratory hygiene.

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

If you are not able to see your family and friends in person, great ways to stay connected include:

- phone calls
- video chats through programs like FaceTime and Skype, and
- 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 to older people receiving aged care services. The CVS can assist people to develop friendships and social connections.

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

- speak to your facility; or
- contact **My Aged Care** by phoning **1800 200 422** or logging 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 visit someone living with dementia or another cognitive impairment, consider other ways of maintaining social contact. This 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 more information.

For more support contact:

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

Should I visit my family and friends in a residential aged care home?

Some state and territory governments have visiting restrictions for residential aged care facilities. These restrictions are important to:

- safeguard the health of residents
- reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19.

In applying these restrictions, residential aged care providers must:

- exercise care and compassion
- provide extra and alternative arrangements to enable residents to maintain regular contact with their family and friends.

If you do visit, the aged care home will have strict procedures you will need to respect and follow. More information is available on the Department of Health website under [Information for families and residents on restricted visits](#).

Aged care peak bodies and consumer advocacy organisations have released an [Industry Code for Visiting Residential Aged Care Homes](#). The Code is a national approach to ensure your loved ones can receive visitors safely during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Code sets out the respective rights and responsibilities of providers, residents and visitors. It outlines that residential aged care services should:

- allow residents to meet their visitors safely during the pandemic
- minimise the risk of introducing or spreading COVID-19 within the residential aged care home.

You can call the facility you wish to visit to understand what processes are in place. If you have concerns with the facility's actions, contact the:

- **Older Person's Advocacy Network** on **1800 700 600**
- **Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission** on **1800 951 822**.

If you are not able to visit, consider other ways to stay in touch. This could include phone and video calls, writing, or filming short videos to share.

Can I get help if I can't buy things at my local shops?

The Australian Government has provided more funding to food services, like Meals on Wheels, to assist older Australians during the pandemic.

The Government is giving faster and more flexible access to critical **Commonwealth Home Support Programme** (CHSP) services like meals and shopping. These CHSP services can be accessed straight away for up to six weeks without an assessment. If you already have an interim Home Care package they can also be accessed.

To access these services contact:

- the **My Aged Care call centre** on **1800 200 422**
- your local service provider.

How do I get the medicines I need?

The Australian Government has created new measures to allow prescription medications to be home delivered. This will help reduce potential exposure to COVID-19. You might also be able to obtain a continuing supply of your usual medications if you are unable to get a prescription from your GP.

Contact your local pharmacy to find out how you can stay safe and obtain your medications without leaving home.

How can I access health services?

Measures designed to contain the spread of the virus are intended to:

- minimise potential exposure for patients and health workers
- take pressure off hospitals and emergency departments.

There are Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) items for telehealth services. Appointments with your doctor or healthcare professional can now take place over a phone or on a video call. These telehealth services may happen in place of some face-to-face consultations.

Services that can currently be accessed via telehealth include:

- GP services
- mental health treatment
- chronic disease management
- health assessments for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- services to people with eating disorders
- services to patients in aged care facilities.

These services may include after-hours appointments.

Contact your healthcare professional to see if you can attend your medical appointments using telehealth.

Should I still go to the doctor?

You should keep your regular health care appointments, including [home care](#), and medical or pathology appointments for [chronic conditions](#).

When you leave your home, it is important that you remember to practise good hygiene and physical distancing.

Are other vaccinations important?

It is very important that you reduce your risk of getting other illnesses while COVID-19 remains in our community. There is currently no vaccine for COVID-19. However, it is important that you get the 2020 flu vaccination, now available from your GP or pharmacy.

Talk to your doctor about whether you should also have the pneumonia vaccination, which is recommended for everyone over 65. You should also discuss having a shingles vaccination.

I received an email/SMS/phone call about COVID-19 from someone I don't trust – is it a scam?

There have been many reports of scams related to COVID-19. For the most accurate and up-to-date information, please rely on [Australian Government](#) material such as this fact sheet.

If you receive communication that you think may be a scam, delete the messages. Do not open any attachments, and do not click on any links. If you think someone may have accessed your financial information, contact your bank immediately.

For the most up-to-date information on scams in Australia, please visit www.staysmartonline.gov.au or call **1300 292 371**.

What should I do about travel or events that I have planned?

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted international travel and a ban is in place for all Australians. You will not be able to depart Australia to travel overseas <https://covid19.homeaffairs.gov.au>.

For information on overseas travel, visit the [Smart Traveller](#) website.

On 8 May 2020, the Government announced the three-step plan to gradually remove baseline restrictions and make Australia COVID-safe. This means that some local trips and travel will be allowed in some states and territories. States and territories will move between the three steps, relaxing or re-establishing restrictions at different times, addressing the local circumstances. State and territory government websites are the best place for information on specific border closures.

Your state or territory will provide directions on non-essential gatherings, how many people can attend an event, or whether certain events are cancelled. You should consider your personal risk before attending large events. In particular, those where it can be difficult to maintain physical distance and hygiene measures.