



FACT SHEET: TESTING OF ASYMPTOMATIC AGED CARE WORKERS – INFORMATION FOR PROVIDERS

11 December 2020

WHY ARE STAFF BEING TESTED?

- Australians living in aged care are among those most vulnerable to becoming seriously unwell with COVID-19. Stopping this virus from spreading into Victoria's aged care facilities is our top priority.
- To help the sector drive down case numbers, the Australian Government has expanded capacity for testing of asymptomatic aged care workers.
- Commonwealth-funded aged care services in Victoria will be contacted to offer in-reach testing for asymptomatic aged care workers. This does not apply to Victorian public facilities.
- This testing gives health authorities the chance to find people with COVID-19 who are working in aged care, before they appear unwell. This will help health authorities identify where community transmission is occurring, before there are COVID-19 outbreaks.
- Testing will also help providers know the COVID-19 status of staff on a given day. This may alert providers if someone is positive before further transmission or a significant outbreak occurs.
- This testing will help protect staff and residents in our aged care services.
- **Remember:** COVID-19 tests are only a point in time indication of whether someone has the virus. Everyone working and living in aged care must:
 - maintain good hygiene measures
 - be alert to symptoms of COVID-19
 - be retested if they become even mildly unwell.

AGED CARE PROVIDERS

Who will be conducting the testing?

- Melbourne Pathology (the testing team) will visit aged care facilities in Victoria that do not have active COVID-19 cases.
- The testing teams will collect specimens from every staff member who agrees to be tested and is at the facility on the day the teams visit.
- Specimens will be tested by Melbourne Pathology, who will provide the results to participants and the facility.
- Melbourne Pathology will also inform the Victorian Public Health Unit of positive results.

How will the facility know when their service is being tested?

- A Clinical Coordinator from Melbourne Pathology will contact your service to register and schedule in a suitable date.
- You will need to provide Melbourne Pathology with a list of all staff members who will be tested, along with their Medicare details, and general practitioner.
- Aged care services in hotspot areas will be given priority for testing of asymptomatic staff.
- It is important to note that testing will be prioritised for services with an identified need.

What is the cost of testing?

- There is no cost to residential aged care facilities or to staff members. The Australian Government is funding this program.
- The testing teams will supply their own personal protective equipment.

Do all residential aged care facilities in Victoria need to participate?

- All residential aged care facilities must participate in accordance with the [Victorian Chief Health Officer Direction](#)¹. The particular information in this fact sheet applies to Commonwealth funded residential aged care facilities.
- While staff participation is voluntary, we strongly encourage staff members to participate. Testing helps to protect residents – those most vulnerable to becoming seriously unwell with COVID-19.
- It will help providers to know the COVID-19 status of staff at the facility on a given day. This may alert providers early if someone is positive, before further transmission or a significant outbreak occurs.

Who can be tested?

- As workers are more likely to contract COVID-19 in the community, they are the primary focus of asymptomatic testing.
- A worker may include allied health staff, cleaning and catering staff and others.
- However, there may be circumstances where asymptomatic residents may opt-in to be tested.

Will staff need to self-isolate after being tested?

- Staff who feel well, and do not display any symptoms, are not required to self-isolate if they participate in asymptomatic testing.
- However, if they subsequently develop symptoms (no matter how mild), they must stay at home and seek medical advice. It is important to note that tests are only a point in time indication and a person's COVID-19 status could change on any given day.

¹ Public Health Direction 14

7(1) An employer in relation to a Work Premises must:

(b) where the employer's Work Premises is an industry that is listed in the Surveillance Testing Industry List and Requirements (as amended from time to time on the advice of the Chief Health Officer), carry out surveillance testing for SARS-CoV-2 on its workers in relation to the Work Premises, in accordance with the requirements of that document, including:

(i) those sections of its workforce required to be tested under the Department Surveillance Testing Industry List and Requirements; and

(ii) a weekly surveillance testing target of the percentage of workers that are to be tested for each industry listed in the Surveillance Testing Industry List and Requirements; and

(c) keep records of surveillance testing of workers for SARS-CoV-2.

Note: the industries and requirements included in the Surveillance Testing Industry List and Requirements may be amended on the advice of the Chief Health Officer.

How will staff find out their results?

- Melbourne Pathology will test the specimens and will report all COVID-19 results directly to the requesting medical practitioner. All positive results are reported to the Victorian Public Health Unit.
- If there is a positive result, the Public Health Unit will notify the worker and aged care facility. It will also support aged care facilities to undertake contact tracing. See [First 24 hours](#) checklist for what to do if there is a positive result.
 - In addition, Melbourne Pathology will immediately arrange for follow up testing of all staff and residents following a request facilitated by the facility, after confirmation with the Victorian Public Health Unit.
- Staff who have registered with a mobile number will receive negative results by text message.

What if my service has a COVID-19 outbreak?

- The testing team is in addition to the in-reach pathology services deployed by the Australian Government and delivered by Sonic Healthcare to residential aged care services with a confirmed or suspected COVID-19 outbreak.
- If an aged care service has a COVID-19 outbreak, the arrangements for testing of residents and staff at outbreak sites will continue.

What will happen if someone presents for a test and appears unwell?

- If a staff member feels unwell, or has symptoms of COVID-19, they must immediately go home and seek further advice.
- They should also follow the facility's COVID-19 protocols. This may include isolation of residents until tests results are known.

Contact the Victorian Aged Care Response Centre for more information:

- 1800 413 957