

COVID-19 Fact Sheet Information for Residential Aged Care Facilities

Emergency Management (Residential Aged Care Facilities No 6) (COVID-19) Direction 2020

To reduce the spread of COVID-19 within South Australia, the State Coordinator has issued a Direction under the *Emergency Management Act 2004* to limit entry into residential aged care facilities in South Australia.

The *Emergency Management (Residential Aged Care Facilities No 5) (COVID-19) Direction 2020* has now been revoked and replaced by the *Emergency Management (Residential Aged Care Facilities No 6) (COVID-19) Direction 2020*. The updated Direction eases some restrictions and clarifies the exemptions that apply.

All providers of residential aged care and members of the public are urged to read the full [Direction](#).

Frequently Asked Questions

Do I have to follow the direction contained within the *Emergency Management (Residential Aged Care Facilities No 6) (COVID-19) Direction 2020*?

Yes, the operator of a residential aged care facility in South Australia must take all reasonable steps to ensure that a person who is prohibited under the direction does not enter or remain on the premises.

It is an offence to breach this Direction and fines may be issued for non-compliance.

When did the Direction commence operation?

The new Direction came into effect on 20 June 2020 at 00:01hrs.

Are family and friends still able to visit their loved one in a residential aged care facility?

Under the Direction, visits for the purpose of providing care and support to a resident are permitted. This includes a visit by a family member or friend of the resident for the purposes of providing social support to the resident, and also includes children.

The following guidelines should be followed in relation to care and support visits:

- > In general, each resident is permitted to receive one care and support visit per day of up to two people.
- > However, the operator of a residential aged care facility may approve additional care and support visits for a resident, if appropriate or required under the circumstances.
- > Visits should be conducted in a resident's room, outdoors, or in a specific area designated by the residential aged care facility, rather than communal areas.
- > Physical distancing of 1.5m should be adhered to wherever possible.

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In addition, the following people are not permitted to visit (clause 4(2) of the Direction):

- > A person who has entered South Australia from any place other than directly from the Northern Territory, Western Australia, Tasmania or Queensland in the last 14 days.
- > A person who has been in contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19 in the last 14 days (except in circumstances where adequate PPE was worn).
- > A person with a fever (>38), or who has a history of fever or chills in the preceding 72 hours, or symptoms of acute respiratory infection or loss of taste and smell.
- > A person who has not been vaccinated against 2020 seasonal influenza, unless that person has a medical contraindication to the influenza vaccine or is an infant aged less than 6 months.

Compassionate visits

- > Aged care providers are asked to take particular care to balance the need to protect residents, staff and others from the risk of transmission of COVID-19, while supporting the rights and wellbeing of residents and their families.
- > Compassionate visits should be given to people in palliative care and those nearing end of life. Under the Direction, 'end of life' is defined as a person for whom death is imminent (likely within 2 weeks). Visits for the purpose of providing end of life support to a resident are permitted and numbers of visitors are not restricted in these circumstances.
- > Relatives and friends who travel from outside of South Australia to provide end of life support to a resident are permitted to visit a residential aged care facility within 14 days of entering the state, provided they self-quarantine at all other times if they are coming from a state/territory other than directly from the Northern Territory, Western Australia, Tasmania or Queensland. Strict processes should be followed to ensure compassionate visits with interstate visitors are undertaken in a way that minimises risk to other residents and staff.
- > **All interstate travellers must complete a cross border pre-approval form at least 72 hours prior to arrival into South Australia.** This form is available online at: <https://www.police.sa.gov.au/online-services/cross-border-travel-application>
- > Visitors who are providing end of life support to a resident are permitted to visit if they have not yet received their flu vaccination, but must take all reasonable steps to get vaccinated as soon as practicable after their initial visit.

Will residents of a residential aged care facility still receive health, medical and pharmaceutical services?

Yes. Health, medical and pharmaceutical services must still be provided to residents and people providing those services are allowed to visit (provided they do not fall into any of the prohibited categories listed in clause 4(2) of the Direction).

Can contractors, along with goods and services providers undertake work at an aged care facility?

Yes (provided they do not fall into any of the prohibited categories listed in clause 4(2) of the Direction). Contractors and persons providing goods and services that are necessary for the effective operation of the residential aged care facility are permitted to enter and remain on site. People providing professional services at the facility, such as hairdressers and advocates, are also permitted to visit.

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Who else can visit a residential aged care facility?

Providing they do not fall into any of the prohibited categories listed in clause 4(2) of the Direction, the following people are also permitted to visit a residential aged care facility:

- > Legal practitioners can attend to take instructions for a client who is a resident of the facility, or for the purpose of the execution of a will or other testamentary instrument by a client who is a resident of the facility.
- > Emergency management or law enforcement personnel, such as police, ambulance and fire services. In the event of an emergency, emergency service personnel may enter the facility regardless of any of the criteria listed in clause 4(2) of the Direction).
- > Officials undertaking regulatory functions, such as the Regulatory Officers from the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission
- > A person conducting a prospective resident visit with one support person.

Can volunteers visit an aged care facility?

Providing that they do not fall into any of the prohibited categories listed in clause 4(2) of the Direction, volunteers who are providing care and support to a resident such as community visitors may visit a residential aged care facility, provided that:

- > it is the only care and support visit made to the resident on that day; or
- > it is an additional care and support visit that has been approved by the operator of the aged care facility.

Volunteers may also enter and remain on the premises of a residential aged care facility if they are providing services that are necessary for the effective operation of the facility.

Can the resident leave and re-enter a residential aged care facility?

- > Yes, residents are now permitted to leave a residential aged care facility and then return, regardless of their reason for leaving.
- > All residents re-entering a residential aged care facility should undertake a [screening checklist](#) for COVID-19 upon their return. If they indicate 'yes' to any identified risk factors, appropriate strategies should be put in place to mitigate any risks to other residents.

Can a residential aged care facility still accept new residents?

Yes. Nothing in the Direction precludes a residential aged care facility from accommodating new residents, whether on a permanent basis or for respite care.

- > All new residents should undertake a [screening checklist](#) for COVID-19 prior to admission.
- > There is no requirement for new or returning residents who are screened as low risk to self-isolate for any period following admission.

Can prospective residents visit the facility they are considering moving into?

Yes providing they do not fall into any of the prohibited categories listed in clause 4(2) of the Direction. A maximum of two people can visit a facility for no more than two hours duration to consider whether a person, holding a valid ACAT approval for residential aged care, shall become a resident.

Do I have to test new or returning residents for COVID-19?

No. The current public health advice is that pre-testing of an asymptomatic person to enter a residential aged care facility is not required. However, all new and returning residents should undertake a [screening checklist](#) for COVID-19 prior to admission. There is no requirement for new or returning residents who are screened as low risk to self-isolate for any period following admission.

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How can I ensure compliance with the Direction if a residential aged care facility is co-located with another facility, for example an acute facility or retirement village?

As separate fact sheet has been prepared to provide advice on compliance with the Direction on co-located sites. This is available on the [SA Health website](#).

How do I apply for an exemption in exceptional circumstances?

All requests for exemptions relating to exceptional circumstances must be made in writing to the Department for Health and Wellbeing via officeforageingwell@sa.gov.au.

- > Include contact details and any information relevant to the request, including the urgency of the situation.
- > Requests will be assessed by a prescribed authorised officer as soon as practicable and the requestor will be advised of the outcome.

Influenza vaccinations

Under the Direction, from 1 May 2020, **all staff and visitors** to a residential aged care facility must be vaccinated against 2020 seasonal influenza.

Does everyone entering a residential aged care facility need to be vaccinated?

Yes. This applies to staff, visitors, health practitioners, volunteers and others (for example, cleaners, tradesman, gardeners, hairdressers, maintenance staff).

The only exemptions to this requirement are:

- > A person who has a medical contraindication to the influenza vaccine (such as person who has a history of anaphylaxis or has had Guillain-Barré Syndrome following vaccination, or who is taking check point inhibitor medication for cancer treatment).
 - The visitor must provide appropriate evidence to the residential aged care facility they wish to visit, for example, a letter from a medical practitioner stating that they have a medical contraindication to the influenza vaccine.
- > Infants aged 6 months or less.
- > In the event of an emergency, emergency services personnel are permitted to enter a residential aged care facility regardless of immunisation status.
- > Visitors who have been called in to provide end of life support to a resident who have not yet received their flu vaccination, however, they must take all reasonable steps to get vaccinated as soon as practicable after their initial visit.
- > If an employee or contractor of a residential aged care facility is not able to access an adequate supply of the influenza vaccine, they may enter the premises provided that the operator of the residential aged care facility:
 - Notifies the Department for Health and Wellbeing via officeforageingwell@sa.gov.au as soon as practicable.
- Takes all reasonable steps to access an adequate supply as soon as practicable.

Note: Due to the vulnerability of this population group, no requests for exemption for other reasons will be considered in relation to flu vaccination.

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What happens if staff do not wish to be vaccinated due to cultural, religious or other reasons?

Residential aged care providers will need to take all reasonable steps to ensure staff who have not had the 2020 seasonal influenza vaccination, and do not have a medical contraindication to the vaccine, do not enter or remain on the premises.

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

Yes. Under the Aged Care Quality Standards, residential aged care providers must offer free flu vaccinations every year to staff and volunteers, and keep records of their vaccinations.

How will aged care providers know whether visitors have been vaccinated?

Aged care providers should seek appropriate evidence of immunisation status from individuals seeking to enter the facility.

- > Appropriate evidence may include a statement or record from a health practitioner, or an immunisation history statement available from Medicare online or the Express Plus Medicare mobile app.
- > Providers may also consider maintaining records to support effective administration and to substantiate their compliance with this requirement.

What if a visitor attends the premises of a residential aged care facility but remains outside and undertakes a visit with a resident through a closed window?

The Chief Public Health Officer and Deputy Chief Public Health Officers have considered this issue and have granted an exemption under clause 5 to allow unvaccinated persons to enter and remain on the premises of a residential aged care facility for the purposes of visiting a resident in the following circumstances:

- > The visitor must remain on the outdoor side of the closed window, with the resident to remain indoors.
- > Physical distancing must be maintained at all times and there must be no contact with other visitors or staff on the premises.

Will residents still have the right to refuse vaccination?

While vaccination for all residents is important to protect themselves and others against influenza, residents have the right to refuse vaccinations.

For more information

Office for Ageing Well
Department for Health and Wellbeing
SA Health, Government of South Australia
www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/COVID2019



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