



# FACT SHEET:

Coronavirus  
(COVID-19)

## WORKERS IN RESIDENTIAL AGED CARE FACILITIES

6 April 2020

Our health care and residential aged care workers are at the frontline of protecting older Australians from COVID-19. It is crucial that we support and protect them.

This information sheet should be read in conjunction with the 'What you need to know' and 'Isolation guidance' information sheets found at [www.health.gov.au/covid19-resources](http://www.health.gov.au/covid19-resources)

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

As health workers are aware, the risk of serious illness from COVID-19 increases with age, and all Australians over 70 years of age, over 65 years of age with existing health conditions; and Indigenous Australian over the age of 50 with existing health conditions, are at increased risk from COVID-19. The highest rate of fatalities to date, is among older people, particularly those with other serious health conditions or a weakened immune system.

For people living with dementia or some form of cognitive impairment, the ability to follow instruction or 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 I go to work?

As a Residential Aged Care Facility worker you are providing an essential service. It is vitally important during this unprecedented time that continuity of service by providers is maintained.

To keep care recipients safe you must not go to work and must alert your employer in the following circumstances:

- You have returned from overseas in the last 14 days,
- You have been in contact with someone diagnosed with COVID-19, or
- You have a fever, or you have any symptoms of respiratory illness (e.g. cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, runny nose or nasal congestion).



If you are in a group who are considered vulnerable to more serious infection (including non-Indigenous and are aged 65 years or older with a chronic illness or are Indigenous and aged 50 years or older with a chronic illness) you should discuss with your employer how best to manage your own risk at work.

## How can I help prevent 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 those in your care you must ensure that you:

- Practise and encourage good hand hygiene and good cough/sneeze etiquette.
- If you are not undertaking direct care duties, maintain a distance of 1.5 metres from residents and instruct visitors to do the same.

You should continue to use standard precautions for preventing infection in all residents at all times. Standard precautions include hand hygiene before and after every episode of physical contact. Additional precautions will be necessary should there be 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 encouraged to complete the COVID-19 training available here

<https://covid-19training.gov.au>

This training includes an infection prevention and control training module designed 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](mailto:support@covid-19training.gov.au) for a priority response.

## Will testing for COVID-19 be available for workers?

If health and residential aged care workers have symptoms of COVID-19, they are eligible for testing for COVID-19. Aged and residential care facilities are classified as high-risk-settings, and will be subject to testing if there are two or more people with fever and respiratory symptoms within the setting. If you have a fever or respiratory illness you should NOT attend your workplace, and you should speak to your health care provider about whether you need to be tested for COVID-19.

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

Generally you will be tested if you develop fever or respiratory symptoms and meet at least one the following criteria:

- you have returned from overseas in the past 14 days
- you have been in close contact with someone diagnosed with COVID-19 in the past 14 days
- you travelled on a cruise ship (either passenger or crew) in the 14 days before developing symptoms



- you are a health care, aged care or residential care worker
- you live in an area where there is a higher risk of community transmission, as defined by the local public health unit.
- If you are in hospital, have a fever and/or serious respiratory symptoms, and there is no other clear cause of the symptoms.

Some states and territories may have more testing criteria based on their respective cases.

## What about influenza vaccinations for RACFs workers?

On the 18th of March 2020 the National Cabinet announced a series of guidelines for visits to Residential Aged Care Facilities. This includes advice about access to RACFs and influenza vaccines <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/update-coronavirus-measures>

All States and Territories have released directions that set out specific requirements in relation to influenza vaccinations. Please check the advice of your State or Territory.

Residential aged care providers must work to have all staff vaccinated in accordance with their state and territory directions.

Aged care providers are required to take all reasonable steps to ensure that a person does not enter or remain on the premises if they do not meet the influenza vaccination (and other) requirements set out in the relevant state and territory directions. This applies to staff, visitors, health practitioners, volunteers and others.

## 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 any 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, please contact the Department of Home Affairs on **131 881** or email [SVCR@homeaffairs.gov.au](mailto:SVCR@homeaffairs.gov.au)

## Will I have access to additional Government payments?

The Australian Government has agreed to additional temporary funding to support Aged Care providers and workers as we face the challenge of coronavirus.



One element of this temporary funding is a 'retention bonus payment' to eligible residential care workers.

- Full-time direct care workers in residential care facilities, including personal care workers, registered nurses, enrolled nurses and allied health will receive a 'retention bonus' of up to \$800 per quarter, paid for two quarters.

There will be pro rata payments for eligible part time and casual workers.

Payments are expected to be made in June and September for the preceding three month period. Details about the exact timing of payments and how they will be made will be advised in due course.

Workers who are unable to attend work because they have been diagnosed with COVID-19 or who are in isolation may qualify for Sickness Allowance (or JobSeeker Payment) if they do not have any employer leave entitlements, such as sick leave, and they meet general eligibility requirements in respect of residency, income and asset tests.

Young people under the age of 22 who are unable to attend work because they have been diagnosed with COVID-19 or who are in isolation may qualify for Youth Allowance if they meet the same requirements.

For more information, visit Services Australia <https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/>

## More information

To protect older Australians and those with compromised immune systems we all need to work together to help stop the spread of COVID-19.

For the latest advice, information and resources, go to [www.health.gov.au](http://www.health.gov.au)

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

If you or a family member are in crisis, please contact Lifeline on **13 11 14**.

The phone number of each state or territory public health agency is available at

[www.health.gov.au/state-territory-contacts](http://www.health.gov.au/state-territory-contacts)

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

