



Visitors to residential aged care and restrictions on entry

Coronavirus (COVID-19) Factsheet – Updated: 20 August 2020

In the changing coronavirus (COVID-19) environment, content is often being updated. To ensure you are aware of the most recent changes, all content updates and the date the document was last updated will be highlighted in yellow

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Who should read this?

This factsheet is for residential aged care providers, staff, workers, visitors and contractors. This information aligns with Victorian Government directives and Commonwealth Government recommendations regarding coronavirus (COVID-19) for the aged care sector.

Older people are at a greater risk of severe illness with coronavirus (COVID-19) and this means that, along with physical distancing and infection control measures, there are also additional requirements to protect older Victorians.

The [Care Facilities Directions <www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/victorias-restriction-levels-covid-19>](http://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/victorias-restriction-levels-covid-19), (the Directions)¹ restrict visitor access across a range of aged care facilities (RACF). The restrictions apply to all Australian Government (Commonwealth) funded residential aged care facilities and implement the position of the National Cabinet regarding entry of visitors.

Restricted areas in Victoria

For the latest information on restrictions in Victoria, visit: www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/victorias-restriction-levels-covid-19

The factsheet *Advice for residential aged care staff and visitors in relation to restricted areas* can be found here: <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/aged-care-sector-coronavirus-disease-covid-19>

Can residents have visitors?

Yes. However, visiting is restricted, with limits on who can visit and the duration and number of visits.

All visitors **must** wear a face covering while attending a RACF due to the vulnerability of older Victorians to coronavirus (COVID-19).

All visitors must continue to practice physical distancing by staying at least 1.5 metres from others, respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene within a RACF. In cases where this is not possible, for example when providing essential care and support, such as assisting with eating, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) may need to be worn.

Under the restrictions, a resident can only have one visitor at a time except in the case of end-of-life care. Visits may only occur:

- if the visitor is a parent, guardian, carer, partner or support person (for example a friend or sibling), of a resident who is aged 18 years or over, to provide emotional and social support that cannot be delivered via electronic or non-physical means. Only one such visit is allowed per day overall, for a maximum of one hour
- if the visitor is providing essential physical, emotional or social care that cannot be delivered by the care team or via electronic or non-physical means. Visits are limited to one visitor at a time.
- for providing interpreter or informal language support to enable the care team to provide care
- if the visitor is a parent, guardian or temporary carer of a resident who is aged under 18 years. Visits are limited to one visitor at a time.

Providing end-of-life care and support to a resident is limited to two visitors at a time, with no limit on duration or number of visits.

¹ Under emergency management powers of the [Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008](http://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/public-health-and-wellbeing-act-2008), the Chief Health Officer may issue written directions considered necessary to alleviate a public health emergency

Anyone under 16 years of age will not be able to visit, unless it is for end of life care and support.

Visitors are encouraged to have an up-to-date influenza vaccination.

What are 'essential care and support' visits?

The restrictions allow visits, of one person at a time, where the person's presence is for the purposes of providing essential care and support necessary for the resident's:

- immediate physical wellbeing that:

- optimises the care and support delivered by workers at the facility and
- cannot be provided by that person via electronic means.

(Examples include providing ongoing support, assistance or personal care to a resident with activities of daily living such as showering, dressing, or meals.)

- immediate emotional and social wellbeing (including mental health support) that:

- optimises the care and support delivered by workers at the facility and
- cannot be provided by that person via electronic means.

(Examples include the person's physical presence is necessary to support individual behaviours of concern, such as for people living with dementia or who have a known or emerging serious mental illness.)

When are visits not allowed?

Residential aged care facilities will be undertaking screening of all visitors. No visitor can enter or remain on the premises of a facility in Victoria if they meet one or more of the following conditions:

- They have been diagnosed with coronavirus (COVID-19) and have not been given clearance from self-isolation.
- They have arrived in Australia from overseas in the last 14 days.
- They have had known contact in the last 14 days with a person who is a confirmed case of coronavirus (COVID-19).
- They have a temperature over 37.5 degrees Celsius, or symptoms of acute respiratory infection.
- They have not been diagnosed with coronavirus (COVID-19) but were required to self-isolate and have not been given clearance to leave their place of isolation.
- They have been tested for coronavirus (COVID-19) and not yet received their result.

These conditions apply to all visitors regardless of age, including essential staff and visiting service providers such as those providing care and support, and end of life support.

A person who ignores these conditions and restrictions will be liable for fines of up to \$20,000 or up to \$100,000 in the case of companies and other bodies corporate.

Can family be with someone to provide end-of-life support?

Yes. The restrictions allow for family and loved ones to provide end-of-life support to a resident, with a maximum of two visitors at any one time.

Apart from the restriction on the number of visitors, restrictions on quantity and duration of visits and age of visitors do not apply when support is being provided to a resident who is towards the end of their life. However, such visits should be managed carefully.

This applies even when end-of-life support is being provided to a resident who is confirmed to have coronavirus (COVID-19).

To help prevent transmission, visitors should be escorted by staff, monitored while donning and doffing PPE, ensure appropriate physical distancing and restrict the length of the visit (ideally no longer than two hours).

There is no requirement for family and loved ones who visit to provide end-of-life support to a resident to self-isolate when they leave the RACF to return home.

Do I need to call the facility before I visit someone?

It is not essential that you call before a visit. However, you should consider contacting the facility before visiting as they may have additional requirements, conditions or restrictions on entry. In some cases, facilities may be closed to visitors to keep vulnerable residents safe or may be restricting visits to include close family only.

You should also speak with other family, friends and carers before you visit. This will avoid a situation where the visitor limit is exceeded. If this occurs, you may be unable to see your family member or friend.

What if there is an outbreak of coronavirus (COVID-19) at a residential aged care facility?

If there is a coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak within a facility, the service will be required to implement its coronavirus (COVID-19) management plan which may require the service to lock down all or part of a facility.

Providers must make decisions to lockdown in the context of existing obligations owed by aged care operators under the relevant Australian Government legislation, including:

- having regard to dignity of risk - the right to exercise choice and control in decision making about care, personal and social experiences and to exercise independence;
- universal infection control - robust screening, cleaning and infection control measures and physical distancing continue to be key to slowing the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) and apply to all staff and visitors of residential aged care facilities.

What measures are in place to make visits as safe as possible?

The coronavirus (COVID-19) [Residential Aged Care Facilities Plan](https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/aged-care-sector-coronavirus-disease-covid-19) <www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/aged-care-sector-coronavirus-disease-covid-19> provides information on how aged care services are working to keep residents, staff and visitors safe. This includes:

- Facilities undertaking temperature checking and health screening of all staff, visitors and attendees before entering the facility.
- Face coverings **must** be worn by all visitors.
- **Face masks and face shields or eye goggles must be worn by staff and workers.**
- Increased communication with residents, families and others about the visitor restrictions and provision of ongoing information to help them understand the restrictions and how they will affect their interactions.
- Scheduling visits to ensure there is a total limit on the number of visitors to the service at any one time and in accordance with the directions.
- Visitors are restricted to certain areas.
- Cleaning and infection control measures required after each visit are put into place.

- Facilities making alternative arrangements to support families, friends and others to maintain regular contact with residents that do not require face-to-face visits, such as organising video conferencing calls, setting up a social communication internet page and reading out and sending emails on behalf of residents.
- While a requirement to have an up to date influenza vaccination is no longer a restriction of the directions, staff and volunteers are still required to be offered the vaccination program as per Commonwealth requirements.

These measures are in place to allow visitors into the facility in accordance with the directions and balance the health and safety of residents and staff, while supporting appropriate infection control.

Are there any other requirements for visiting?

If a visitor meets the requirements for visiting, they must:

- visit only the resident
- wear a face covering
- maintain at least a 1.5 metre physical distance from the resident and all other people in the facility for the duration of the visit. In cases where this may not be possible, for example when providing essential care and support such as assisting with eating, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) may be a requirement.
- wear PPE as directed by staff. If PPE is required, visitors will need to wear the same type of PPE as staff. Staff must educate and help visitors to correctly put on and take off PPE.
- enter and leave the facility directly without spending time in communal areas
- perform hand hygiene before entering and after leaving the resident's room.

What is the *National Code for Visiting Residential Aged Care Homes During COVID-19*?

Major providers have signed up to the *National Code for Visiting Residential Aged Care Homes During COVID-19* which sets out principles, rights and responsibilities, and a complaints process. It also provides links to practical resources about innovative ways to facilitate compassionate visits, while complying with the Directions. For example:

- setting up a visitor register or booking system to control the number of visitors to the facility;
- only permitting visits which are pre-organised and at a mutually convenient time for the facility and the visitor;
- having a visitors' room or other controlled space for visits in the facility, to permit visitors to be monitored;
- regular communication with the family contact of residents to assist with increased anxiety over reduced visiting;
- facilitating communication with residents through electronic means, in lieu of regular in person visits.

How can providers facilitate visitor compliance with the directions?

Services can develop a *Visitors Code of Conduct* for all visitors to their facility, modelled on the National Code, which:

- is clearly communicated with visitors and incorporated into any visitor booking system;
- is displayed at the entrance to the facility to ensure that visitors are aware of what is expected of them;
- explains consequences for non-compliance, including an express statement that any non-compliance places the health and safety of residents, staff and the community at risk;

- explains that in the event of non-compliance, staff may ask visitors to leave.

Who else can enter a residential aged care facility?

Other than a resident's family and loved ones, there are limitations on the services that can enter a residential aged care facility. Essential services include:

- **Regular staff** of the service who provide clinical care, food services, administrative functions, cleaning and other essential non-clinical contractors.
- **Other visiting clinical staff** such as visiting medical officers, general practitioners, geriatricians, palliative care physicians and other medical specialists; pharmacy services; specialist nurses; diagnostics services; and allied health services, for example, physiotherapists.

Other services that are permitted under the Directions include those providing **behavioural support services** and **functional and well-being support services**, for example: hairdressing, diversional and recreational therapies, music therapies.

In restricted areas of Victoria, only permitted workplaces are allowed to operate under strict conditions (for example, they must have a COVIDSafe Plan). Hairdressing for example, is not permitted and these restrictions also apply to visits to RACFs. Further information about business restrictions is available at <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/business-industry-stage-4-restrictions-covid-19>

Clinical visits will be limited to essential assessments and management for residents' health conditions, including assessment and management of coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms.

Other assessments and clinical activities may be postponed if they do not have adverse impacts on the health of the resident. Non-essential service providers cannot enter the facility.

Visits are also permitted under the restrictions if the person is visiting as a prospective resident of the facility or for the purposes of accompanying a prospective resident. Only one visitor is permitted at any one time and they must abide by the requirements for visiting.

What measures should be put in place for those providing services in residential aged care?

The following measures must be in place for service providers attending an aged care facility:

- Coronavirus (COVID-19) screening must be undertaken to ensure visitors:
 - that were previously diagnosed with coronavirus (COVID-19), have been given clearance from isolation
 - that were required to isolate for any reason, have been cleared to leave isolation, even if they were never diagnosed with coronavirus (COVID-19)
 - have not arrived in Australia from overseas in the last 14 days
 - have not had known contact in the last 14 days with a person who is a confirmed case of coronavirus (COVID-19)
 - do not have a temperature over 37.5 degrees Celsius, or symptoms of acute respiratory infection
 - that have been tested for coronavirus (COVID-19), have received a negative result and complied with any isolation requirements.
- Compliance with all Deputy Chief Health Officer Directions, including the above requirements and the restrictions on persons aged under 16 years entering a care facility.
- All other usual police checks, statutory declarations and public liability insurance completed as per requirements for contractors.

- Face masks (surgical masks) must be worn by service providers.

Can building works continue at residential aged care services?

In restricted areas, under the Restricted Activity Directions (Restricted areas) – permitted work may only be undertaken “for the purpose of essential maintenance”.

In areas not subject to Stage 4 restrictions, if there are no confirmed coronavirus (COVID-19) cases at the facility, if the works are necessary and with the following measures in place:

- No contact with residents.
- Physical distancing of at least 1.5 metres from other people is maintained.
- Coronavirus (COVID-19) screening of workers must be undertaken to ensure:
 - that if they have been diagnosed with coronavirus (COVID-19), they have been given clearance from isolation
 - that if they were required to isolate for any reason, that they have been cleared to leave isolation, even if they were never diagnosed with coronavirus (COVID-19)
 - they have not arrived in Australia from overseas in the last 14 days
 - they have not had known contact in the last 14 days with a person who is a confirmed case of coronavirus (COVID-19)
 - they do not have a temperature over 37.5 degrees Celsius, or symptoms of acute respiratory infection
 - that if they have been tested for coronavirus (COVID-19), have received a negative result and complied with any isolation requirements.

Compliance with all Deputy Chief Health Officer Directions <<https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/victorias-restriction-levels-covid-19>>, including the above requirements and the restrictions on persons aged under 16 years entering a care facility.

- All other usual polices checks, statutory declarations and public liability insurance completed as per requirements for contractors.
- Face coverings must be worn unless wearing a face covering creates a risk to the person due to the work they are doing, as determined through OH&S guidelines.

Can tradespeople and waste collectors attend residential aged care services?

In restricted areas, under the Restricted Activity Directions (Restricted areas) – permitted work may only be undertaken “for the purpose of essential maintenance”.

In areas not subject to Stage 4 restrictions, if there are no confirmed coronavirus (COVID-19) cases at the service, if the work is necessary and with the following measures in place:

- No contact with residents
- Physical distancing maintained
- Coronavirus (COVID-19) screening of workers, including contractors and tradespeople, must be undertaken to ensure:

- that if they have been diagnosed with coronavirus (COVID-19), they have been given clearance from isolation
- that if they were required to isolate for any reason, that they have been cleared to leave isolation, even if they were never diagnosed with coronavirus (COVID-19)
- they have not arrived in Australia from overseas in the last 14 days
- they have not had known contact in the last 14 days with a person who is a confirmed case of coronavirus (COVID-19)
- they do not have a temperature over 37.5 degrees Celsius, or symptoms of acute respiratory infection
- that if they have been tested for coronavirus (COVID-19), have received a negative result and complied with any isolation requirements.
- Compliance with all Deputy Chief Health Officer Directions <<https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/victorias-restriction-levels-covid-19>>, including the above requirements and the restrictions on persons aged under 16 years entering a care facility.
- All other usual police checks, statutory declarations and public liability insurance completed as per requirements for contractors.

For waste collectors, please note:

- If the waste collectors are entering the premises, including outdoor areas used by residents and if there are no confirmed coronavirus (COVID-19) cases at the service, the same measures would apply as for other contractors.
- Face coverings must be worn unless wearing a face covering creates a risk to the person due to the work they are doing, as determined through OH&S guidelines.

How can I make a complaint?

If you or a family member or loved one is unhappy with how a facility is managing visitors, contact the facility manager or director of nursing to discuss your concerns.

If this discussion does not resolve the matter, you can contact the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission to make a complaint. The Commission can be contacted [on their website](https://www.agedcarequality.gov.au/making-complaint) <<https://www.agedcarequality.gov.au/making-complaint>> or on 1800 951 822.

Where can I get more information?

The Victorian and Commonwealth governments have developed coronavirus (COVID-19) aged care specific websites with resources and guidelines. The situation and actions required are changing rapidly. We recommend you regularly check these websites, and subscribe to updates:

Department of Health and Human Services (Victoria)

Coronavirus (COVID-19) advice for the aged care sector: www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/aged-care-sector-coronavirus-disease-covid-19

Victoria's coronavirus (COVID-19) daily update: www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus-covid-19-daily-update

Department of Health (Commonwealth)

Coronavirus (COVID-19) advice for the health and aged care sector: www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-for-the-health-and-aged-care-sector

Coronavirus (COVID-19) advice for people in aged care facilities: www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert/advice-for-people-at-risk-of-coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-for-people-in-aged-care-facilities

Australian health alerts: www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts

Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission

Advice for residential aged care providers:

www.agedcarequality.gov.au/sites/default/files/media/ACQSC_Visitor_restrictions_V6.pdf

To find out more information about coronavirus and how to stay safe visit

[DHHS.vic – coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\)](http://DHHS.vic – coronavirus disease (COVID-19))

<<https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus>>

If you need an interpreter, call TIS National on 131 450

For information in other languages, scan the QR code or visit

[DHHS.vic – Translated resources - coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](http://DHHS.vic – Translated resources - coronavirus (COVID-19))

<<https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/translated-resources-coronavirus-disease-covid-19>>



For any questions

Coronavirus hotline 1800 675 398 (24 hours)

Please keep Triple Zero (000) for emergencies only

To receive this document in another format phone 1300 651 160 using the National Relay Service 13 36 77 if required, or [email Emergency Management Communications](mailto:covid-19@dhhs.vic.gov.au) <covid-19@dhhs.vic.gov.au>

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