



# Visitors to residential aged care and restrictions on entry

Coronavirus (COVID-19) Factsheet – Updated: 9 October 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](http://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/victorias-restriction-levels-covid-19) <[www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/victorias-restriction-levels-covid-19](http://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/victorias-restriction-levels-covid-19)>, (the Directions)<sup>1</sup> restrict visitor access across a range of residential 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.

## Restrictions in Victoria

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

Providers are required to balance any measures they put in place to slow the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) against the broader responsibilities of care facilities to the physical, emotional and psychological wellbeing of their clients.

All visitors **must** wear a **fitted face mask<sup>2</sup>** while attending a RACF due to the vulnerability of older Victorians to coronavirus (COVID-19). **A face shield on its own is not sufficient to meet the mask requirement.** The most recent guidance from the Department of Health and Human Services on face masks can be found here: [www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/face-masks-vic-covid-19#what-does-wearing-a-fitted-face-mask-mean](http://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/face-masks-vic-covid-19#what-does-wearing-a-fitted-face-mask-mean).

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 physical distancing 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, or for people under 18 years of age. 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, **cultural, spiritual or** social support that cannot reasonably be delivered via electronic or non-physical means. Only one such visit is allowed per day overall, for a maximum of **two** hours.

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<sup>1</sup> **Care Facilities Directions (No 12) made under** emergency management powers of the [Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008](#), the Chief Health Officer may issue written directions considered necessary to alleviate a public health emergency.

<sup>2</sup> A fitted face mask must cover the nose and mouth of the wearer; this is a requirement of the [Stay at Home Directions \(Restricted Areas\) \(No 16\) cl.5\(6\)](#). Refer also to cl.13(11) for the definition of a 'face covering'.

- if the visitor is providing essential care and support for the person's physical, emotional, cultural, spiritual or social wellbeing that cannot be reasonably delivered by via electronic 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 two visitors 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.

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:

- physical wellbeing that:
  - optimises the care and support delivered by workers at the facility, and
  - cannot be reasonably 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.)*
- emotional cultural, spiritual, or 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.

*(Note this no longer requires that it be for 'immediate' physical, social or emotional wellbeing.)*

*(Examples include the person's physical presence is necessary to support individual behaviours of concern, such as for people living with dementia, cognitive impairment, cognitive disability 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 isolation.
- They have arrived in Australia from overseas in the last 14 days.
- They are in 14-day quarantine as a known contact of 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 staff and 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.

**End-of-life is defined as a situation where the resident's death is expected within weeks or where the resident, with or without existing conditions, is at risk of dying from a sudden acute event. It does not apply in a situation where a resident has an advanced, progressive, incurable condition, general frailty or co-existing conditions, that mean that the resident is expected to die within 12 months.**

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).

When the safety measures of the facility have been complied with throughout the visit there is no requirement for family and loved ones who are providing end-of-life support to a resident who is coronavirus (COVID-19) positive to 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 are required to balance any measures they put in place to slow the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) against the broader responsibilities of care facilities to the physical, emotional and psychological wellbeing of residents.**

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.

Providers must also take all reasonable steps to ensure that residents can telephone, video or use other electronic communication with parents, guardians, partners, carers and support persons of residents to support their physical, emotional and social wellbeing and mental health.

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

The coronavirus (COVID-19) [Residential Aged Care Facilities Plan <www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/aged-care-sector-coronavirus-disease-covid-19>](http://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.
- A fitted face mask that covers the nose and mouth<sup>3</sup> must be worn by all visitors. Please refer to the most up to date guidance on face masks here: [www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/face-masks-vic-covid-19#what-does-wearing-a-fitted-face-mask-mean](http://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/face-masks-vic-covid-19#what-does-wearing-a-fitted-face-mask-mean).
- 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 in 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 fitted face mask that covers the nose and mouth<sup>4</sup>. Please refer to the most up to date guidance on face masks here: [www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/face-masks-vic-covid-19#what-does-wearing-a-fitted-face-mask-mean](http://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/face-masks-vic-covid-19#what-does-wearing-a-fitted-face-mask-mean).
- 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

<sup>3</sup> A face shield is not sufficient on its own.

<sup>4</sup> A face shield is not sufficient on its own.

- 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 coronavirus (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:  
**Particular emphasis should be given to setting up an outdoor area if possible**
- regular communication with the family contact of residents to assist with increased anxiety related to reduced visiting
- facilitating communication with residents through electronic means, in lieu of regular face-to-face 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 will 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.
- **Advocates with a legislated role** such as the National Aged Care Advocacy Program and the Community Visitors Scheme.

Other services that are permitted under the Directions include those providing **behavioural support services** and **functional and wellbeing support services**, for example: hairdressing, diversional and recreational therapies, music therapies. **In metropolitan Melbourne, 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: [www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/business-industry-restrictions-by-industry-covid-19](http://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/business-industry-restrictions-by-industry-covid-19).**

Clinical visits are 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 metropolitan Melbourne during the Second Step – [permitted work](#) may only be undertaken “for the purpose of essential maintenance”.

In areas not subject to restrictions in the Second Step, if there are no confirmed coronavirus (COVID-19) cases at the facility, and if the work is necessary, it may be undertaken 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:

- they are not coronavirus (COVID-19) positive
- that if they have had coronavirus (COVID-19), they have been given clearance from isolation by the Department of Health and Human Services
- 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)
- that if they have been tested for coronavirus (COVID-19) and should be isolating until they receive their results
- they do not have a temperature over 37.5 degrees Celsius, or symptoms of acute respiratory infection.

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.
- **Face masks** must be worn unless wearing a mask creates a risk to the person due to the work they are doing, as determined through OH&S guidelines. **Face coverings such as a scarf or bandana no longer suffice. Please refer to the most up to date guidance on face masks here: [www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/face-masks-vic-covid-19#what-does-wearing-a-fitted-face-mask-mean](http://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/face-masks-vic-covid-19#what-does-wearing-a-fitted-face-mask-mean).**

## 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 restrictions in the Second Step, if there are no confirmed coronavirus (COVID-19) cases at the service, and if the work is necessary, it may be undertaken 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:
  - they are not coronavirus (COVID-19) positive
  - that if they have had coronavirus (COVID-19), they have been given clearance from isolation by the Department of Health and Human Services
  - 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)
  - that if they have been tested for coronavirus (COVID-19), have received a negative result and complied with any isolation requirements.
  - that if they have been tested for coronavirus (COVID-19) and should be isolating until they receive their results
  - they do not have a temperature over 37.5 degrees Celsius, or symptoms of acute respiratory infection.



- 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.

Waste collectors:

- 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 masks** must be worn unless wearing a face mask creates a risk to the person due to the work they are doing, as determined through OH&S guidelines. **Face coverings such as a scarf or bandana no longer suffice. Please refer to the most up to date guidance on face masks here: [www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/face-masks-vic-covid-19#what-does-wearing-a-fitted-face-mask-mean](http://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/face-masks-vic-covid-19#what-does-wearing-a-fitted-face-mask-mean).**

## How can I make a complaint?

If you, 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>](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts)

Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission

**To make a complaint: <https://www.agedcarequality.gov.au/making-complaint>**

Advice for residential aged care providers: [www.agedcarequality.gov.au/sites/default/files/media/ACQSC\\_Visitor\\_restrictions\\_V6.pdf](http://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 \(COVID-19\)](https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus)

<<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 \(COVID-19\)](https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/translated-resources-coronavirus-disease-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

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