

Best Practice COVID-19 Safety: for Aged Care Services

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This information provides best practice guidance to help aged care services manage COVID-19, influenza and other acute respiratory illnesses, safely.

Please use this information alongside Tasmanian public health guidance: *Best Practice COVID-19 Safety: for Employers.*

Public Health strongly recommends all aged care services comply with requirements of the *Work Health and Safety Act* by:

- undertaking a COVID-19 risk assessment
- developing and maintaining policies and procedures to minimise the chances of COVID-19 and other infectious illnesses spreading among staff and clients/residents
- using best practice guidance to inform those policies and procedures.

Risk

Elderly people are at increased risk of severe illness from COVID-19 and other viruses. Residents of aged care facilities are also more likely to be exposed to viruses because of the number of people coming and going from the facilities.

COVID-19 recommendations

To reduce the risk from COVID-19 and other respiratory illnesses it is recommended that:

residents of residential aged and disability care facilities who test positive to COVID-19 should isolate for at least 7 days from the date of their positive test result

All other people who test positive to COVID-19 should:

- stay home until their acute symptoms have resolved
- not attend residential aged or disability care facilities or hospitals, as workers or visitors, for at least 7 days after their positive result
- avoid large gatherings and indoor crowded places for at least 7 days
- inform Public Health of your positive result if they tested positive on a rapid antigen test (RAT)

- let their workplace know about your positive result - workplaces may have policies in place for the return to work of cases and close contacts of COVID-19
- wear a mask when indoors and on public transport if they must leave home.

Close contacts

Close contacts are those people that live with or spend a lot of time in a residential setting with a person diagnosed with COVID-19. They are at higher risk of catching COVID-19 and then passing the virus on to others.

Individuals who have had close contact with someone who has tested positive are at increased risk of getting COVID-19.

There are simple steps close contacts can take to reduce the risk to others:

- monitor for symptoms and test immediately if symptoms develop
- stay home if they get any symptoms
- it is recommended that they don't visit high-risk settings, including residential aged care facilities. In special circumstances, like end-of-life care, extra precautions can be put in place to allow these visits
- if they must visit others, it is recommended they do a rapid antigen test (RAT) before they go
- it is recommended they wear a facemask when indoors or on public transport for 7 days after the last contact with case or from when the case tested positive
- inform their employer that they are a close contact - workplaces may have policies in place for the return to work of cases and close contacts of COVID-19
- get tested as soon as possible if they have symptoms and remain at home while the symptoms continue.

Individuals who have symptoms and test negative for COVID-19 on a RAT, should repeat the RAT or have a PCR the next day.

They should remain at home until symptoms have mostly resolved. If individuals have to leave home for any reason while they have symptoms they should wear a facemask.

The management of COVID-19 continues to evolve, and as evidence accumulates, advice may be revised. Updates are available at www.coronavirus.tas.gov.au. If any information in this factsheet is inconsistent with information on that website, please use the information online.

Best practice planning

- Review your COVID-19 safety plan and workplace health and safety policy and procedures; ensure they cover management of COVID-19 cases and close contacts, in staff, visitors and residents.
- Maintain your outbreak management plan; consider including influenza and other acute respiratory infections in its scope. See the Case and Outbreak Management Framework for Tasmanian Settings.
- Have policies and processes in place to manage staff with respiratory or other COVID-19 symptoms, and staff who are close contacts.
- Have policies and processes in place to manage visitors with COVID-19 symptoms.

Workers and visitors with symptoms

Public Health strongly recommends anyone with acute (or new) respiratory symptoms including fever, cough, sore throat and/or runny nose, stay at home, even if those symptoms are mild, and get tested for COVID-19. Testing can be by PCR laboratory test or RAT.

If the result is negative and they still have acute symptoms, they should stay at home and repeat the test in the next 24-48 hours.

If the result is negative the second time and they still have acute symptoms, they should continue to stay at home until the symptoms resolve completely or there is significant improvement. There are other respiratory viruses, including influenza viruses, that can cause serious illness in some people, and spread easily from person to person.

Anyone with a fever, who feels unwell or has any increase in symptoms, should stay home even if they test negative for COVID-19. If symptoms have resolved, they can return to work. If some mild symptoms remain, Public Health recommends they wear a face mask when away from home. If they have any concerns, or are unsure if their symptoms are improving, Public Health recommends they seek medical advice.

Best practice risk control measures for staff and visitors

- Strongly recommend and facilitate staff to be up to date with COVID-19 and influenza vaccination. See Best Practice Guidance for Workplaces: Vaccination.
- Recommend visitors be up to date with vaccination against COVID-19 and influenza.
- Screen staff and visitors for:

- > respiratory and other COVID-19 symptoms (those with symptoms are most likely to spread illness)
- > COVID-19 close contacts; for the latest definition of close contact visit www.coronavirus.tas.gov.au

- Have a supply of RATs available for staff use, to enable rapid identification of cases.
- If there is a strong reason for a staff member or visitor with symptoms or who is a close contact to enter the facility, require them to:
 - > do a COVID-19 test and return a negative result before entering the facility
 - > wear a face mask while in the facility (and near anyone at risk of severe illness)
- Consider requiring use of face masks by staff and visitors when COVID-19 and/or influenza are highly prevalent in the community. Encourage use of face masks by staff and visitors at other times. (Public Health will generally advise when influenza and COVID-19 are highly prevalent.) See Best Practice Guidance for Workplaces: Face masks.
- Ensure good ventilation. Have doors and windows open, when safe and appropriate. Encourage visits to occur outside, when safe and feasible. See Best Practice Guidance for Workplaces: Ventilation.
- Encourage physical distancing. See Best Practice Guidance for Workplaces: Physical Distancing.
- Continue to display COVID-19 safety signage.
- Ensure appropriate cleaning and disinfection, with a focus on frequently touched surfaces. See Best Practice Guidance for Workplaces: Hygiene & Cleaning.
- Ensure alcohol-based hand gel is readily available for staff and at entrances to the facility.
- Ensure tissues and rubbish bins are readily available.

Best practice risk control measures for residents

- Recommend and support residents to be up to date with vaccination against COVID-19 and influenza.
- Be familiar with local/national guidance for management of acute respiratory infections in residential care facilities; regularly review for updates.
- Ensure care for any symptomatic residents follows local and national guidelines.
- Maintain systems to identify and test residents with symptoms of COVID-19 and influenza in your setting.

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Test early to support a rapid response and minimise the spread of illness.

- Maintain a robust infection control program, as per national guidelines. Ensure staff receive regular training on infection prevention and control measures, including appropriate use of personal protective equipment.
- Identify close contacts in the setting. Support them to follow the latest instructions for close contacts provided by Public Health (Tasmania), including to be alert for signs of COVID-19 and to get tested.
- Encourage and support residents to wash and sanitise their hands regularly.
- Have facility information (size, layout, staff/resident numbers, vaccination levels) ready to provide to Public Health to support outbreak risk assessment and mitigation, if requested.

Important resources

- www.coronavirus.tas.gov.au
- Tasmanian COVID-19, Influenza, Respiratory Syncytial Virus and Other Viral Respiratory Illness Outbreaks in Residential Aged Care Facilities - Toolkit to Support Planning, Preparedness and Response
- National Guidelines for the Prevention, Control and Public Health Management of Outbreaks of Acute Respiratory Illness (including COVID-19 and Influenza) in Residential Care Facilities at www.health.gov.au
- Australian Guidelines for the Prevention and Control of Infection in Healthcare (2021) at www.safetyandquality.gov.au
- Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission COVID-19 provider resources at www.agedcarequality.gov.au
 - > Outbreak management guidance
 - > Infection prevention and control leads
 - > Visitor access for residential aged care services
 - > Infection control spot checks.

Support and further information

Support is available to the aged care sector for management of COVID-19 and other disease outbreaks.

Public Health:

public.health@health.tas.gov.au | 1800 671 738.

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