

# FACT SHEET:

## FOR FAMILIES AND RESIDENTS ON RESTRICTED VISITS TO RESIDENTIAL AGED CARE FACILITIES

Older people are more susceptible to getting sick with COVID-19. The Australian Government has put in place new restrictions to protect older Australians living in residential aged care facilities.

V1, 19 March 2020

### WHAT IS COVID-19 (CORONAVIRUS)?

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that cause respiratory infections. These can range from the common cold to more serious diseases. COVID-19 is the disease caused by a new coronavirus. It was first reported in December 2019 in Wuhan City in China. It has now become a global pandemic.

### HOW IS IT SPREAD?

The virus can spread from person to person through:

- close contact with an infectious person (including in the 24 hours before they started showing symptoms)
- contact with droplets from an infected person coughing or sneezing
- touching objects or surfaces (like doorknobs or tables) that have droplets on them from an infected person, and then touching your mouth or face.

### WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

The symptoms of COVID-19 are similar to colds and flus and can include:

- Fever
- Sore throat
- Shortness of breath
- Fatigue
- Cough

While the COVID-19 virus is of serious concern, it is important to remember, at this stage, that most people displaying symptoms such as fever, cough, sore throat or fatigue may be suffering from a cold, flu, allergies or other respiratory illness – not COVID-19.

### WHY IS THIS VIRUS SO DANGEROUS FOR OLDER PEOPLE?

The risk of serious illness from COVID-19 increases with age. The highest rate of fatalities is among older people, particularly those with other serious health conditions or a weakened immune system. There is currently no cure or vaccine for COVID-19, or immunity in the community.

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.

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





## FOR FAMILIES

### **I HAVE A RELATIVE IN A RESIDENTIAL AGED CARE FACILITY, CAN I VISIT THEM?**

It is important to keep up-to-date with and follow Australian Government advice. For the latest advice and information, go to [www.health.gov.au](http://www.health.gov.au)

The Australian Government has put restrictions in place to protect residents and workers in residential aged care facilities.

The following people will not be permitted entry to residential aged care facilities:

- People who have returned from overseas in the last 14 days
- People who have been in contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19 in the last 14 days
- People with fever or symptoms of acute respiratory infection (e.g. cough, sore throat, runny nose, shortness of breath)
- People who have not been vaccinated against influenza (after 1 May 2020)
- Children aged 16 years and under (exemptions can be assessed on a case-by-case basis, for example, where the resident is in palliative care).

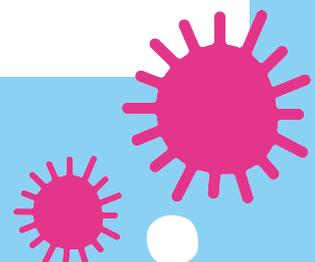
Care providers understand the difficulty that these new arrangements will pose for families and should manage cases compassionately, especially when it relates to end-of-life situations, palliative care and dementia units.

### **HOW WILL MY VISIT BE DIFFERENT?**

The new restrictions in place to protect your loved ones in care will likely mean changes in the way you go about your visit. These include:

- Limiting visits to a short duration
- Limiting visits to a maximum of two immediate social supports (family members, close friends) or professional service or advocacy at one time
- Conducting visits in a resident's room, outdoors, or in a specific area designated by the aged care facility, rather than communal areas where the risk of transmission to residents is greater
- Undergo a health screening ahead of a visit.

In addition to this, visitors will be encouraged to practise social distancing, including maintaining a distance of 1.5 metres.





## SHOULD I CONTINUE TO VISIT OLDER FRIENDS AND RELATIVES?

If you don't absolutely have to go to support a resident in care, please don't.

It's best to keep in touch via phone and video calls, send postcards, photos or artwork, or film short videos to share. This will limit your exposure to COVID-19 and your chances of accidentally spreading it to the other older people in your life.

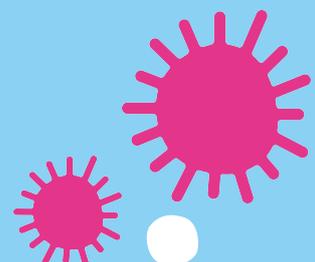
If you regularly visit someone living with a cognitive impairment, considering other ways of maintaining social contact will help reassure individuals who may feel anxious about possible changes to their day to day life. You can also contact the National Dementia Helpline on 1800 100 500.

## WHAT ELSE CAN I DO TO PROTECT MY LOVED ONE IN AGED CARE?

Even if you are feeling well, it is important to take steps to prevent the spread of this virus. Good hygiene and taking care when interacting with other people is the best defence for you and your family against COVID-19:

- Covering your coughs and sneezes with your elbow or a tissue
- Disposing of tissues immediately they are used, into a dedicated waste bin and washing your hands
- Washing your hands often with soap and water, including before and after eating and after going to the toilet, and when you have been out to shops or other places
- Using alcohol-based hand sanitisers, where available
- Cleaning and disinfecting surfaces you have touched
- Where possible, stay 1.5 metres away from others as part of social distancing
- If you are sick, avoiding contact with others.

If you start to feel unwell, phone the National Coronavirus Helpline on 1800 020 080 or your GP who will be able to provide you with further advice. Older people aged 70+ (or 50+ for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people) or people with chronic conditions are able to seek medical support from their GPs through bulk-billed telehealth (videolink), and telephone services. Examples of possible video applications include FaceTime and Skype. Medical practitioners must be satisfied that the services they use to video link with their patients meet current standards and laws regarding privacy and information security.





## FOR RESIDENTS

### WHY CAN'T I SEE MY FAMILY?

Your family may limit their visits to help you keep safe.

In many circumstances, you will be able to see some members of your close family. Visits will be limited to two people per visit and children aged 16 will not be permitted, except in exceptional circumstances.

However, unless it's absolutely critical your visitors come to see you face to face, you should consider asking them not to. Stay in touch by video call or over the phone.

These changes are designed to protect you and other residents from COVID-19.

### WHY CAN'T I SEE MY RELATIVES AGED 16 AND UNDER?

We understand this restriction will be difficult for some families. However, children are not always reliable when it comes to practising the good hygiene necessary to stop the spread of COVID-19.

### WHAT ABOUT PALLIATIVE CARE?

Providers are expected to show compassion and make sensible decisions on a case-by-case basis, including in relation to children, for residents in palliative care.

### WHEN WILL THESE RESTRICTIONS FINISH?

These are temporary changes and will be relaxed on the advice of the Chief Medical Officer and State and Territory Chief Health Officers. You should plan for these changes to be in place for a number of months.

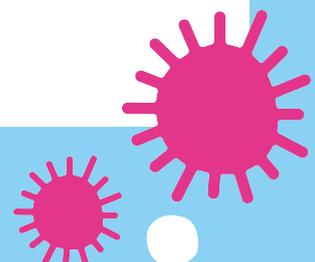
### WHAT IF I'M BEING ADMITTED FROM ANOTHER FACILITY?

Screening for symptoms of COVID-19 in residents being admitted or re-admitted from other health facilities and community settings should be conducted.

No new residents with symptoms of COVID-19 will be permitted to enter the facility.

### IS THERE A CHANCE THESE RESTRICTIONS WILL BECOME EVEN HARSHER?

The COVID-19 is a rapidly evolving health emergency. The situation is changing by the day – and further changes to restrictions will be made in line with medical advice.





## MORE INFORMATION

Some aged care providers are asking all visitors not to visit centres in order to protect the older people living in the facility. In these cases, there is usually a process the provider has in place for exceptions, such as when a loved one is very unwell or in a palliative stage. Call the facility to understand what processes are in place. If you have concerns with the centre's actions, contact the Older Person's Advocacy Network on 1800 237 981 or the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission on 1800 951 822.

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

Call the National Coronavirus Health Information 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.

The phone number of your 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 a doctor.

If you, a family member or friend needs crisis support, please call Lifeline on 13 11 14.

