

Best Practice COVID-19 Safety: for Aged Care Services

Factsheet | Version 2.0 | 22 July 2022

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 maintain 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 requirements

Under the *Public Health Act (1997)*:

- people who test positive to COVID-19 must
 - > isolate for at least 7 days from the date of their positive test result; this includes residents of aged care facilities
 - > inform Public Health of their positive result if they used a rapid antigen test (RAT)
 - > not visit residential aged care facilities for at least 7 days after their positive result
- close contacts of COVID-19 cases must:
 - > inform their employer that they are a close contact
 - > test daily with a RAT for 7 days if leaving home
 - > wear a face mask outside the home, when in any indoor space (unless exempt)
 - > isolate and test as soon as possible if they have symptoms
 - > not visit high risk settings, including residential aged care facilities, other than as permitted (employers may permit close contacts to work in high-risk settings, with risk controls according to workplace risk assessment)

Public Health will advise on situations like end-of-life care.

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, to 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:
 - recent (within the past seven days) positive COVID-19 test results
 - 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 COVID-19 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. 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.

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.