



Dear aged care service provider

**Re: Advice regarding COVID-19 (novel coronavirus)**

I am writing to provide updated advice regarding COVID-19 (formerly known as novel coronavirus) to all aged care service providers, including providers of residential aged care services, home services and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Flexible Aged Care program.

While the number of cases of COVID-19 is currently small in Australia, it is possible that this situation could change at any time, and providers of all services need to give a high priority to planning and being prepared for this scenario. I refer you to the important advice on this matter issued to aged care providers by Australia's Chief Medical Officer, Professor Brendan Murphy on 26 February 2020.

Further, the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission (the Commission) is currently giving close attention to ensuring providers' compliance with the relevant requirements under the Aged Care Quality Standards and Aged Care Act through its assessment and monitoring activities.

**Aged Care Quality Standards**

All aged care service providers should pay close attention to requirements under the Aged Care Quality Standards (Quality Standards) at this critical time and be vigilant in maintaining the highest possible standards for minimisation of infection-related risks. Providers are urged to undertake a self-assessment against the Quality Standards taking into account the requirements under Standard 3 and Standard 8 and ensure that your services have in place arrangements for:

- assessment and management of risk associated with infectious outbreaks if infection is suspected or identified
- ensuring adequate care of the infected individual
- protection measures for consumers staff and for residential aged care services, visitors to the service
- notification advice to consumers, families, carers and relevant authorities.

**Provider requirements to take precautions to control the flu and minimise infection-related risks**

Annual vaccination is the most effective way to reduce the impact of influenza in the community, especially in residential aged care services. While the flu vaccine for 2020 is not yet available, providers are reminded that under the *Quality of Care Principles 2014* and the *Records Principles 2014* your service(s) must take precautions to prevent and control the flu and minimise infection-related risks. That includes:

- identifying and complying with all relevant Commonwealth and state or territory legislation and regulatory requirements
- having an effective infection prevention and control program that is in line with national guidelines
- offering free flu vaccinations every year to your staff and volunteers, and keeping records of their vaccinations

You must also demonstrate:

- how you have promoted and informed your staff and volunteers about the benefits of vaccination
- the steps you have taken to encourage staff and volunteers to get vaccinated

Further information and links to useful resources can be found in Attachment A to this letter and on the [Department of Health website](#).

It should be noted that this letter provides advice to aged care service providers which is current at the date of this letter.

In closing, I assure you that the Commission continues to work closely with the Commonwealth Department of Health who co-ordinates with State and Territory health systems including public health units.

Yours sincerely

*J. M. Anderson*

Janet Anderson PSM  
AGED CARE QUALITY AND SAFETY COMMISSIONER  
2 March 2020

## Attachment A

### Additional advice and resources

Further resources that may assist aged care service providers are listed below.

- Services should implement effective infection prevention and control programs that are in line with national guidelines. The ***Australian Guidelines for the Prevention and Control of Infection in Healthcare*** set out the requirements for best practice infection control.
- The Department of Health has developed the ***Australian Health Sector Emergency Response Plan for Novel Coronavirus***, which is a useful reference tool for preparing your emergency plan, particularly with respect to pandemic infections.
- Further information on the public health management of COVID-19 is available in the Communicable Diseases Network Australia (CDNA) National Guidelines for Public Health Units in the Series of National Guidelines (SoNGs) – **[www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/cdna-song-novel-coronavirus.htm](http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/cdna-song-novel-coronavirus.htm)**.
- Factsheets and resources specifically for aged care staff, residents and families that provide advice on measures to limit transmission of the virus are available on the Department's website - **<http://www.health.gov.au/resources/collections/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-resources>**.
- A 24-hour National Coronavirus Health Information Line is available on 1800 020 080. The line provides health and situation information on the COVID-19 outbreak.

### Travel advice

Aged care service providers are encouraged to regularly check the Government's Department of Health and Smart Traveller websites for the latest advice in relation to their staff, consumers and their families.

It should be noted that as well as for China and Iran, the Smart Travel has raised its advice level for South Korea and Italy to 'exercise a high degree of caution' -

**<https://www.smarttraveller.gov.au/news-and-updates/coronavirus-covid-19>**

Additionally, the Department of Health's website states, updated today:

If you are returning from Italy or South Korea, and you work as a healthcare worker or as a residential aged care worker, you should not attend your regular work for 14 days.

**<https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert>**