



Dear residential aged care provider

### **Antiviral treatments are key to managing COVID-19 outbreaks**

Thank you for your ongoing efforts to protect the health and wellbeing of those in your care during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The resilience and sustained attention to detail that aged care providers have demonstrated over the last two years will continue to serve you well as the next wave of the coronavirus sweeps across the country and enters more aged care settings.

Last week, the Commission released a [clinical alert](#) detailing steps you must immediately take to minimise the risks presented by COVID-19.

Up-to-date vaccination for both aged care residents and staff provides the best protection against COVID-19. However, it is not a perfect shield against infection which for some people may still lead to severe illness and hospitalisation. For this reason, antiviral therapies should be an early consideration for adults in high-risk groups – including aged care residents – who test positive to the virus, irrespective of their vaccination status. **Oral antiviral treatments can save lives.**

On 14 July, the Commonwealth Chief Medical Officer released an important [statement on the standard of care](#) on COVID-19 oral antiviral treatments in residential services. The Commission considers this best practice guidance and will be regulating the sector accordingly.

Oral antiviral treatments for COVID-19 are a key additional strategy to help keep people out of hospital and stop COVID-19 illness from becoming severe. The COVID-19 oral antiviral treatments, nirmatrelvir and ritonavir (Paxlovid®) and molnupiravir (Lagevrio®), are both available on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) and can be accessed through community pharmacies.

In line with the latest evidence, people aged 70 years or older can be prescribed COVID-19 antiviral treatments when they test positive, regardless of risk factors or the presence of symptoms. People aged 50 years or older can access these therapies where two risk factors are present, including living in residential aged care, chronic respiratory symptoms, kidney failure, or diabetes. Clinical assessment of an individual is a prerequisite for any prescription of an antiviral medication.

### **Winter plan**

The [Winter Plan – A guide for residential aged care providers](#) released by the Department of Health and Aged Care details the proactive steps that residential aged care providers must take now. These include:

- ensuring people you are providing care to are up to date with their vaccinations
- encouraging and, where possible, facilitating vaccination (including COVID-19 winter boosters)

- seeking consent from residents and families to administer antiviral treatment if prescribed
- arranging for general practitioners (GPs) to consider eligibility of residents for medications, including adjustments in dosage or oral preparation requirements
- ensuring you have an agreed process with GPs for timely prescription in the event of an outbreak.

If a GP is unable to visit an aged care home, Medicare is currently covering Telehealth consultations for prescription of COVID antivirals. If an aged care home cannot access a GP, you can seek support from your [local Primary Health Network](#) (PHN). PHNs can provide access to GPs through their Commissioned Home Visits program, available until 31 December 2022. This program supports COVID-positive residents in aged care homes and those receiving support at home to have access to face-to-face clinical care which can help avoid unnecessary ambulance call-outs and escalations to hospital. GPs providing face-to-face services to aged care residents under the Home Visits program can access personal protective equipment (PPE) from PHNs.

As a provider of residential aged care, it is your responsibility to be prepared so you can respond quickly and lessen the impact of any infectious disease outbreaks. Your outbreak management plan should be comprehensive, up to date, well-rehearsed and ready to activate immediately.

COVID-related resources, and links to relevant information and education for providers, are available on the Commission's website. The Commission is monitoring services' compliance with infection control arrangements and the appropriate access to and use of antiviral medications for any aged care residents who contract COVID-19. Additional targeted education and monitoring is being provided to support higher risk residential services and those experiencing an outbreak.

A slow or ineffective response to an outbreak places both residents and staff at increased risk of harm and is likely to result in regulatory action by the Commission.

Please draw on the published resources available to help you prepare and respond to any changes in circumstances which could impact the safety, health and wellbeing of the residents in your care.



Janet Anderson PSM  
**Commissioner**

20 July 2022

**Useful resources:**

Staying well informed is a key element in your outbreak preparedness. A range of new information on winter preparedness has been released to the sector this month.

**Department of Health and Aged care:** [health.gov.au](https://www.health.gov.au)

[Winter Plan – A guide for residential aged care providers](#)

The Winter Plan provides overarching guidance and resources for aged care providers to support their readiness, response and recovery from exposures and outbreaks of COVID-19 and/or influenza during winter 2022.

**Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission:** [agedcarequality.gov.au](https://www.agedcarequality.gov.au)

[How prepared are you for a COVID-19 outbreak?](#)

This provider fact sheet includes critical guiding questions for all residential aged care providers to ensure services are doing everything possible to prevent, prepare for and reduce the impact of a COVID-19 outbreak.

[Impact of COVID-19 subvariants – Be on guard against another wave of COVID-19 infections](#)

This clinical alert details steps aged care providers must take now to minimise the risk that COVID-19 presents to their staff, residents and other people receiving aged care.