



# COVID-19 oral antiviral treatments in Residential Aged Care Services

29 July 2022

**COVID-19 can be very serious for aged care consumers even when they are fully vaccinated. The spread of COVID-19 is increasing across the community and in residential aged care services (RACS). Of all the treatment measures available to services, rapid access to oral antivirals could make the biggest difference to consumers if they become infected with COVID-19.**

## COVID-19 oral antiviral treatment

Molnupiravir (**Lagevrio**®) and nirmatrelvir and ritonavir (**Paxlovid**®) are oral antiviral treatments which can be used for consumers in RACS who are experiencing active COVID-19 infection. Both medications are Schedule 4 Prescription Only Medicine.

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 also access these treatments when

they reside in residential aged care. Medical assessment of an individual is a prerequisite for any prescription of an antiviral medication.

Where clinically appropriate, the antiviral treatment should be offered to every consumer **within 24 hours of a positive test to COVID-19**. The treatment should be commenced as soon as possible after a diagnosis of COVID-19 and within 5 days of symptom onset.

When prescribing and administering COVID-19 oral antiviral treatments, especially to consumers with swallowing difficulties or enteral feeding tubes, health professionals should refer to the manufacturer's instructions and medical advice. These include advice from [The Society of Hospital Pharmacists of Australia \(SHPA\)](#) and [NPS MedicineWise](#).

Consumers receiving oral antiviral treatments should be closely monitored for medication side effects.

## Access to oral antivirals by RACS

The Department of Health and Aged Care (Department) distributed the oral COVID-19 antiviral Lagevrio® to all RACS in February 2022 (in advance of community pharmacy access) for the treatment of COVID-19-positive consumers. Pre-placed allocations of the antivirals were based on the number of consumers and staff at each RACS as reported through providers' My Aged Care data. All RACS were allocated Lagevrio® automatically without an application process.

RACS are encouraged to use the pre-placed supplies of antivirals before replenishing stock through existing community pharmacy channels. Where supplies have been exhausted and additional stock cannot be obtained through existing commercial mechanisms, this may be resupplied through the [National Medication Stockpile](#) upon request.

If a RACS is unable to access a GP:

- Support from local Primary Health Networks (PHNs) is available. PHNs can provide access to General Practitioners (GPs) through their Commissioned Home Visits program, available until 31 December 2022. This program supports COVID-positive consumers in RACS and those receiving support at home to have access to face-to-face clinical care and help avoid unnecessary ambulance call-outs and escalations to hospital.
- Consumers can be assisted to have a telephone or video consultation with a GP to obtain a prescription for antivirals following the consumer's COVID-19 positive diagnosis. Medicare will cover a [long consultation by a GP for the purpose of prescribing COVID-19 antivirals](#) until 31 October 2022.

## Preparatory steps by approved providers

To facilitate rapid access and best practice treatment in a RACS setting, residential aged care providers are expected to take **preparatory steps to plan for a COVID-19 outbreak** including:

- discussing with consumers and/or their nominated representatives and seeking consent from them to administer antiviral treatment if prescribed
- arranging for the consumer's prescriber (e.g. GP, Nurse Practitioner) to consider the eligibility of the consumer for antiviral treatments, including consideration of contraindications, adjustments in dosage and/or oral preparation requirements
- ensuring an agreed process with GPs or Nurse Practitioners for timely prescription in the event of an outbreak
- confirming stock and stock level of oral antivirals at the service, including stock expiry dates
- ensuring a dispensing pathway is established and maintained with their community pharmacy and/or the National Medication Stockpile.

## Monitoring the preparedness to access and deploy oral antivirals

The Commission is monitoring RACS' compliance with infection control arrangements and the appropriate access to and use of oral antivirals for any consumers who contract COVID-19. Regulatory officials from the Commission will seek information on the RACS' preparatory steps and management of the COVID-19 oral antiviral treatment, including through Infection Control Spot Checks, on site performance assessments and telephone monitoring contacts.

During a performance assessment, quality assessors will seek relevant information under the Risk-based question 8: 'What action has the service taken to assess and minimise infection-related risks for the care of aged care consumers, including the impact of a potential coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak?' Specifically, quality assessors are seeking evidence of preparedness to access and deploy oral antivirals immediately to suitable consumers, in the event of an outbreak occurring. For example, looking for evidence that a provider has detailed processes in place that cover the preparatory steps outlined above.

Additional questions have been added to the Infection Control Spot Checks which include, for example:

- Are all consumers with an active COVID-19 infection receiving antiviral treatment? (if suitable)
- Has the service spoken to all consumers and/or their representatives and documented consent or the decision to refuse antiviral treatment for the consumer?
- Has the service spoken to consumers' medical officers to plan for review and prescribing of antivirals for consumers who test positive to COVID-19 including out of hours?

Regulatory officials will also be telephoning some approved providers to understand their access to and use of COVID-19 antivirals treatments and seek assurance that actions have been taken to facilitate rapid access and best practice treatment if consumer/s test positive to COVID-19.

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

## **Provider responsibilities and expectations**

Residential aged care providers have responsibility for the management and mitigation of infection-related risks, and to be prepared so they can respond quickly and lessen the impact of any infectious disease outbreaks.

Providers are required to deliver care and services that comply with the Aged Care Quality Standards. Relevant requirements relating to the access and deployment of antiviral treatments may include but are not limited to:

- Standard 3 requirement (3)(a) Each consumer gets safe and effective personal care, clinical care, or both personal and clinical care
- Standard 3 requirement (3)(d) Deterioration or change of a consumer's mental health, cognitive or physical function, capacity or condition is recognised and responded to in a timely manner
- Standard 3 requirement (3)(f) Timely and appropriate referrals to individuals, other organisations and providers of care and services
- Standard 3 Requirement (3)(g) Minimisation of infection-related risks
- Standard 8 requirement (3)(c) Effective organisation-wide governance systems
- Standard 8 requirement (3)(d) Effective risk management systems and practices.

Providers are also required to deliver care and services that comply with Part 2 of the Quality of Care Principles 2014. Specifically:

*Item 2.4 - Treatments and procedures that are carried out according to the instructions of a health professional or a person responsible for assessing a care recipient's personal care needs, including supervision and physical assistance with taking medications, and ordering and reordering medications, subject to requirements of State or Territory law.*



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