



Australian Government

Department of Health and Aged Care



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Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission

Dear aged care providers

With the Easter festive period approaching and ahead of the winter season, we will soon again be spending time with family and friends.

Heading into these periods, we are starting to see an increase in COVID-19 transmissions in the community, which increases the risk to vulnerable people in our community and in higher risk settings such as aged care. To protect the health of older Australians, we must continue to be vigilant by maintaining COVIDSafe behaviours.

Vaccinations are our best line of defence against COVID-19 and following ATAGI's announcement about the 2023 COVID-19 vaccine booster dose, now is the time to start engaging with your residents and care recipients who are eligible (last COVID-19 vaccine dose or confirmed infection was 6 months or longer) about accessing the booster dose, as this will bolster their protection against COVID-19.

We strongly encourage the bivalent vaccine as this offers additional protection against the original COVID-19 virus and most recent Omicron variants.

Early access to COVID-19 oral anti-virals saves lives so it remains important to plan ahead for these treatments. Please discuss advanced consent and assessment with your residents, families and primary care teams to help ensure rapid access to medication if required. These treatments are safe, effective and available to all Australians aged 70 or over and those in high-risk groups. From 1 April 2023, eligibility for Paxlovid will be expanded for people between the ages of 60 and 69 years to include those with one risk factor.

Under the Aged Care Quality Standards (Quality Standards) in the *Aged Care Act 1997*, [every aged care provider is responsible](#) for ensuring that they have sufficient staff with the necessary knowledge and skills to provide safe, respectful, and quality care and services.

Providers are also responsible for ensuring that staff have the necessary training, including in infection control practices and procedures, and in the appropriate use of personal protective equipment (PPE) including gloves, face masks, face shields, and gowns.

The [National Statement of Expectations on COVID-19 Management in Aged Care Settings](#) and the [National COVID-19 Community Protection Framework](#) for a COVID Safe Australia (residential aged care and in-home care service providers) step you through strategies to manage risks when there is higher community prevalence. These include:

- maintaining high standards of Infection Prevention and Control
- surveillance testing for staff and visitors through rapid antigen testing (RAT) and screening for symptoms and mask wearing (N95 or P2) when indoors or engaging with older people
- consulting with health practitioners and facilitating in-reach PCR testing, if required
- activating and scaling up Outbreak Management Plans.

Infection prevention and control measures should never be “set and forget”, nor should they be dependent on just one person within your service. Staff providing close personal care in a residential aged care or in-home care setting must know how to access information and support in this area at any time. Management must have clear systems to ensure:

- IPC process oversight, audit and monitoring
- disease outbreak prevention, detection and management
- immunisation recording, antiviral therapy access and timely access to medical services
- monitoring and facilitation of staff education and competency training.

IPC Lead Nurses in residential care and other relevant staff in aged care services need to have specific roles and be involved in all of the above.

Please also reinforce the following protective actions to your staff, residents or care recipients, and visitors:

- ask visitors to wear a mask indoors and when visiting older people to reduce risk of transmission
- conduct visits outside or in well ventilated areas (open windows if you can) and be mindful of physical distancing
- advise visitors and staff to stay home if they feel unwell or test positive to COVID-19, and to make another time for their visit
- have hand hygiene stations at entry and other easily accessible points for visitors and staff
- promote the Partnerships in care program and resources, and
- being up to date with COVID-19 vaccinations.

We know how important visitors are to the social, emotional, and mental health and wellbeing of older Australians. If you operate an aged care home, it is important that you have a clear plan on how you will manage visitors to ensure that important social contacts continue even where your service has an outbreak of COVID-19. You can find information to support you [here](#). Of course, your planning must include how IPC measures apply to visitors to your aged care home. We also encourage you to stay up to date with any changes to State or Territory guidance that will help inform any decisions you make.

Thank you for your continued hard work and dedication over the past three years focusing on protecting your residents, care recipients and staff.

Yours sincerely



Professor Paul Kelly
Chief Medical Officer

30 March 2023



Janet Anderson PSM
Aged Care Quality and Safety
Commissioner

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