



Residential Aged Care Facilities

Frequently asked questions

We need to ensure visiting procedures support the rights of older people and can be sustained in a way that also maintains the protection of all residents of an aged care home over the longer term.

The Aged Care Quality Standards and the Charter of Aged Care Rights still apply, and residents have the right of choice and can determine who they want to visit them.

Are there any restrictions on visitors to Residential Aged Care Facilities in WA?

Yes, in accordance with the Public Health State of Emergency in WA, there are restrictions on who can visit a Residential Aged Care Facility (RACF). These are specified in the [Visitors to Residential Aged Care Facilities Directions No 4](#) (the Directions).

What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

COVID-19 presents as a mild illness for approximately 80% of cases, with fever and cough being the most commonly reported symptoms. Other symptoms include headache, sore throat, fatigue, shortness of breath, myalgia (muscle pain), anosmia (lack of smell), dysgeusia (lack of taste), chills and vomiting.

When is a person exempt from the requirement to have a flu vaccination before entering the facility?

The Directions stipulate that a person must not enter or remain on the premises of an RACF if the person does not have an up to date vaccination against influenza unless a vaccination is 'not reasonably available to the person' or if the person has a documented medical contraindication to the vaccine.

What is a medical contraindication to the vaccine?

Medical contraindications include a history of anaphylaxis after a previous dose of any influenza vaccine (or after any component of an influenza vaccine), or a history of Guillain Barre. If a person is receiving cancer immune-oncology therapies, they should discuss with their treating oncologist about the risks and benefits of influenza vaccination.

What is meant by 'reasonably available'?

The annual seasonal vaccine for the 2020 influenza season is due to expire at the end of February 2021 and there is now very limited availability of this vaccine. The annual seasonal vaccine for the 2021 influenza season is expected to be first available in late March 2021. As such, there will be a period of upcoming weeks when the vaccine is not 'reasonably available'.

Assuming the current federal timelines for shipping influenza hold, the 2021 influenza vaccine should be widely available in immunisation services at the end of April 2021. Before that time several people seeking to enter a RACF may fall within this 'not reasonably available'

exemption related to the Directions. Facilities will need to be aware of this situation when reviewing the vaccination status of visitors and staff.

How will the vaccination program for COVID affect the flu vaccination program?

Advice from the Australian Technical Advisory Group on immunisation (ATAGI) is that the preferred minimum interval between administration of the either Pfizer/BioNTech or the University of Oxford/AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccines and any influenza vaccine is 14 days. This is precautionary advice.

We will continue to communicate to the RACF Direction, including updates to the flu vaccination requirements and key dates, as they come to hand.

Do residential aged care providers need to provide free flu vaccination to staff and volunteers?

Yes. All Australian Government subsidised residential aged care providers are required to offer staff and volunteers free access to annual flu vaccination at the provider's cost.

What are aged care providers' obligations regarding persons entering the RACF?

Aged care providers are required to take all reasonable steps to ensure that a person does not enter or remain on the premises if they do not meet the flu vaccination (and other) requirements set out in the relevant Directions.

What are the minimum rules around number of visitors and duration of a visit, as specified in the Direction?

There are no longer any rules around number of visitors and duration of a visit, but visitors must comply with instructions given to them by the supervisor of the facility.

Can a facility put in place more stringent visiting requirements?

A facility may regulate the overall number of visitors to minimise the risk of the introduction of COVID-19 into an RACF and may be required to replace in-person visits or in-room visits with window visits or additional ways to connect in response to any COVID-19 outbreak in the area in which the RACF operates. Regular and responsive communication between families and the facility should increase in circumstances where there are increased visitor restrictions.

Is there an age limit for visitors?

No, there is no longer an age restriction on visitors.

What are the rules around end-of-life visits?

There are no rules around end-of-life visits. Physical distancing recommendations should be considered when making decisions about end of life support visits. Although there may be no public health risks to the resident receiving end of life support, consideration should be given to limiting risks for staff, visitors and other residents of the RACF. This could involve limiting the number of people in a room at any one time, and minimising unnecessary interaction with staff, visitors and other residents. Hand hygiene practices should be reinforced, and visitors should not attend the facility if they are unwell.

What about flu vaccination for end-of-life visits?

If there is inadequate time for the visitor to access flu vaccination ahead of an end-of-life visit, the vaccine is 'not reasonably available' to them. However, the visitor should NOT attend the facility if they are unwell.

Will visitors need to wear PPE when they visit a facility?

There may be circumstances where visitors need to undergo infection prevention and control training, including the use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to align with the providers infection prevention and control practices.

If there is an outbreak of COVID-19, will visitors still be able to visit the facility?

RACFs may move into increased visitor restrictions when an outbreak (including non-COVID-19) occurs within the home or the local community.

See <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidelines-for-outbreaks-in-residential-care-facilities>

Facilities should implement the following:

- Suspend all group activities, particularly those that involve visitors (e.g. musicians).
- Postpone visits from non-essential external providers (e.g. hairdressers and allied health professionals).
- Inform regular visitors and families of residents of the COVID-19 outbreak, and request that they only undertake essential visits.
- Ensure visitors who do attend the RACF to visit an ill resident are recorded on a register of visitors and comply with the following guidance:
 - Report to the reception desk on arrival
 - visit only the ill resident
 - wear PPE as directed by staff
 - enter and leave the facility directly without spending time in communal areas
 - perform hand hygiene before entering and after leaving the resident's room and the RACF.

What are the rules if a visitor comes from interstate?

If the visitor has been given a modified quarantine direction on entry to WA, e.g. to visit a relative who has had a serious medical episode or whose death is imminent, they are required to contact the Facility manager of the relevant RACF to discuss the intended visit and to be advised of any specific requirements. They will be required to wear a surgical mask for the duration of the visit and adhere to specific visiting times.

What are the rules for emergency services personnel?

A person whose presence at a facility is required for the purposes of emergency management, law enforcement or otherwise responding to an emergency does not require an up to date vaccination against influenza. This includes response to allegations of elder abuse and hospital transfers in response to a need for urgent medical treatment.

If an ambulance officer has had exposure to a person who has a confirmed case of COVID-19, can they enter the facility?

If the officer wore appropriate PPE at the time of contact, they would not be 'exposed' and could enter the facility.

What are the rules for tradesmen?

All other contractors that are required to attend a site must have an up -to-date flu vaccination. This is inclusive of funeral directors.

Who can I contact if I am not happy with the way the facility is managing visitors?

If you are not happy with the facility management of visiting options, you can raise your concerns with the [Older Persons Advocacy Network](#) (OPAN) on 1800 700 600, or the [Aged Care Safety and Quality Commission](#) on 1800 951 822.

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This document can be made available in alternative formats on request for a person with disability.

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