

# GP strategies to support prevention of acute respiratory infections (ARI) for people with a disability



The below advice is for General Practitioners (GPs) to support the prevention and management of acute respiratory infections (ARI) such as influenza (flu), COVID-19 and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) for patients with disability, especially people living in a disability care facility or disability group home.

## Develop a care management plan

In consultation with their patient, GPs should develop and annually review a care management plan. [The Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care](#) and the [Council for Intellectual Disability](#) have developed resources to support GPs completing annual health assessments for people with disability to identify any medical intervention and preventive health care required. The care plan can include pre-assessment for antiviral medicines for people who are [eligible](#). Pre-assessment is recommended to facilitate prompt treatment. A [pre-assessment form](#) and [COVID-19 and influenza antiviral medicines fact sheet](#) for clinicians is available.

GPs can provide online, in-person or in-home consultation services.

## Create a safe environment

During high levels of COVID-19 in the community, people with disability may be hesitant to visit their GP because of the risk of exposure to viral illnesses from other patients in the practice. Consider strategies to help create a safe environment for people who are vulnerable, including:

- Allocating appointments during quieter periods of the day
- Reserving a section of the waiting area with increased physical distancing
- Encouraging the use of face masks for everyone entering the practice.

## Supporting access to prevention and treatment

### Vaccination

People who are at higher risk of severe disease from flu are eligible for a free flu vaccination under the [National Influenza Vaccination Program](#).

People with disability should stay up to date with recommended vaccinations. They may be eligible to get an additional [COVID-19 booster vaccination](#).

### Testing

GPs can work with their patients to consider how they can be tested for respiratory viruses quickly. PCR (nose and throat swab) tests can detect multiple respiratory viruses, including [influenza](#), [respiratory syncytial virus \(RSV\)](#) and [COVID-19](#) at the same time. Rapid antigen testing can also be used to diagnose COVID-19 quickly, however PCR tests are more accurate and should be used for those who are at higher risk of severe disease. Some Local Health Districts and some private pathology providers can do in-home PCR testing. For further information contact your local Public Health Unit on 1300 066 055 or call the Disability Gateway on 1800 643 787.

### Treatment

If a person with disability tests positive to COVID-19 they should follow NSW Health's [testing positive to COVID-19 and managing COVID-19 safely at home](#) guidance. Most people can manage COVID-19 or flu safely at home. If your patient or their carer is concerned, they may call you.

People at higher risk of severe disease, may be eligible for antiviral treatments. See section '**Develop a care management plan**' above for further information.