

Keeping residential aged care facility residents safe this season

Staying safe over the holiday period



As we enter the festive season, it is important for aged care facility residents to spend time with family and loved ones.

There are some health risks that aged care providers should be mindful of during this period, including circulating respiratory viruses (particularly COVID-19), warm weather, mosquito-borne diseases and food safety.

This guidance provides some tips and reminders for aged care providers to help residents remain safe during the festive season.

Staying safe from respiratory illnesses

Facilities should plan ahead to ensure they have a safe and enjoyable festive period. Being prepared means residents and staff can enjoy this time, while remaining safe.

Please stay up to date with the latest [advice to residential aged care facilities \(RACFs\)](#). Facilities should ensure residents stay up to date with recommended vaccinations, including COVID-19.

- People aged 75 years and older are recommended to have a COVID-19 vaccine every 6 months.
- People aged 65 – 74 years are recommended to have a COVID-19 vaccine every 12 months but can receive one every 6 months.

Facilities should ensure a [Pre-assessment action plan for respiratory infections in aged care facility residents](#) is completed in case residents acquire COVID-19 or influenza during the public holidays when doctors may be less available. Please see the [Guidance on use of antivirals in residential aged care facilities \(RACF\)](#) for further information.

Facilities should have appropriate preparedness plans in place to ensure a timely response to acute respiratory infections (ARIs). Continue following the [Guidance for residential aged care facilities on the public health management of acute respiratory infections](#), for residents and staff who test positive for an ARI or are exposed during the holiday season.

Visitors and staff

Visits can occur even if there are cases of COVID-19 or other acute respiratory viruses (ARIs) in the facility.

All visitors should follow the facility's entry requirements. Facilities should determine their own measures to allow visits to safely occur.

Visitors should not enter the facility if they have cold or flu symptoms or if they have tested positive for COVID-19 in the last 7 days.

When there are **moderate** or **high** levels of respiratory viruses circulating in the community as per the [NSW Respiratory Surveillance Report](#), masks should be worn by RACF staff. Visitors are encouraged to wear a mask in common areas of the facility to protect those at higher risk of severe illness.

Holding an event

Where an event has performers (e.g., choirs, carol singers or musicians), facilities should ensure:

- Performers comply with the facility's entry requirements, and these are communicated to them in advance.
- Performers should not enter the facility if they have cold or flu symptoms or if they have tested positive for COVID-19 in the last 7 days.
- Where possible, events should be held in large, well-ventilated spaces that support physical distancing. Use natural ventilation where possible. Events can be held outdoors if appropriate and not too hot, with adequate shaded areas.
- Consider holding several smaller events if required for safe physical distancing, or offer alternative options for residents to participate, such as video streaming from residents' rooms.

Individual outings and group excursions

Outings and excursions can still occur even if there are COVID-19 cases in the facility.

It is important that residents have opportunities to attend family gatherings and group excursions outside of the facility during the holiday period. However, residents who are unwell should delay their outing, be tested for respiratory infections, and stay at the facility until they feel better.

Before an outing or excursion:

- Residents may choose to wear a mask to protect themselves. See the [mask wearing advice](#).
- Residents should be guided about [COVID safe behaviours](#), such as hand hygiene.
- Family and friends who have cold and flu symptoms should not attend gatherings with RACF residents to help protect their loved ones. In exceptional circumstances, symptomatic people can attend but should do a COVID-19 rapid antigen test (RAT) before seeing their loved one, wear a mask and meet in an outdoor area where possible.

Residents should be tested for COVID-19 if they develop any symptoms after returning to the facility.

Preventing mosquito bites

Mosquitoes are more prevalent during summer and in rural and coastal areas some mosquitoes can transmit diseases.



If going home with family or out on excursion or in outdoor areas in the grounds of the facility, residents should be encouraged to:

- Cover up while outside (wear loose, light-coloured clothing with long-sleeves and pants and covered footwear and socks).
- Apply mosquito repellent evenly to all areas of exposed skin. The most effective repellents contain picardin, DEET or Oil of Lemon Eucalyptus (OLE). If you are also applying sunscreen, apply the sunscreen first and then the repellent.

Facilities should have fly screens on windows that can be opened to prevent mosquitoes from getting inside.

Staying safe from heat and warm weather

Facilities should plan ahead so that residents can keep cool and stay hydrated in warm weather.

Check that air-conditioners, fans, refrigerators and freezers are in good working order and medications can be appropriately stored. Consider any building changes or installations that may keep indoor areas cooler such as curtains, blinds, external awnings and shutters.

During warmer weather and particularly if going home with family or out on excursion residents should be encouraged to:

- Avoid being outdoors in the hottest part of the day
- Wear light, loose-fitting clothing
- If outside, apply sunscreen and wear sun-protective clothing
- Spend time in cooler areas
- Drink plenty of water even if not thirsty (unless on fluid restriction). If a resident is on limited fluid intake, please follow their doctor's advice on how much to drink during hot weather
- Take water with them if they will spend time away from the facility.

Food safety

Warm weather also increases the risk of foodborne illness. The [Guidelines for Food Service to Vulnerable Persons](#) provides advice on how to manage the risk of food service. Ensure your residents and family who are preparing meals are aware of the [high risk foods](#) for people over 65 years.

Facilities can help protect residents from unsafe food practices over the summer period by sharing good food safety tips with family members. These helpful tips include:

- Keep it cold – put food that needs to be kept cold in the fridge straight away and dispose of any food that's meant to be in the fridge if it's been left out for over 4 hours.
- Keep it clean – ensure everyone practices good hand hygiene including washing and drying hands thoroughly before preparing any food, and prevent people from touching any communal food by providing individual servings or separate utensils for serving.
- Keep it hot – hot foods should be kept above the safe temperature of 60°C prior to serving.

Further information can be found on the [Gastroenteritis in aged care facilities webpage](#).

Facilities can contact their local [Public Health Unit \(1300 066 055\)](#) if they have any concerns with the above advice.

We wish you a safe and enjoyable festive period

