



FAQs – Restrictions on entry into and visitors to aged care facilities

All states and territories have released directions that set out requirements for entry into, and visitors to, residential aged care facilities. These directions give effect to the decisions made by National Cabinet that were announced by the Prime Minister on 18 March 2020. Providers and staff will need to contact their relevant state or territory departments for any further information regarding the application of these restrictions in each state and territory.

The state and territory directions include specific requirements in relation to **flu vaccinations** and are published on websites as follows:

- [New South Wales](#)
- [Victoria](#)
- [Queensland](#)
- [South Australia](#)
- [Western Australia](#)
- [Tasmania](#)
- [Australian Capital Territory](#)
- [Northern Territory](#)

Influenza vaccinations

The annual influenza (flu) vaccine for 2020 is now available. It is particularly important this year as the healthcare system faces the COVID-19 global pandemic and cases of flu can increase the burden on the health system.

While the flu vaccine cannot protect against COVID-19, it is possible to become ill with both influenza and COVID-19, which has the potential to cause severe outcomes including hospitalisation.

Does everyone entering a residential aged care facility need to be vaccinated?

Yes. This applies to **staff, visitors, health practitioners, volunteers and others** (e.g. cleaners, tradesman, gardeners and maintenance staff).

What happens if staff are not able to be vaccinated due to cultural, religious or health reasons?

Some jurisdiction's directions allow for some exemptions to the entry restrictions.

Residential aged care providers and workers should contact their relevant state and territory health departments for further information about how these requirements apply and to seek specific information in relation to any applicable exemptions.

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

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

What should aged care workers do if they experience symptoms after getting the flu vaccine?

Some people who receive the flu vaccine will experience fever as a side effect,¹ however this is unusual in adults and if caused by the vaccine is usually mild and short-lived.² Fever is also a common symptom of COVID-19. Developing a fever or feeling lethargic soon after receiving the flu vaccine may be a side effect of the vaccine, or could be an early indication of infection.

Given this, it is recommended that aged care workers with a fever ($\geq 38.0^{\circ}\text{C}$) or history of fever (e.g. night sweats, chills) or symptoms of an acute respiratory infection (e.g. shortness of breath, cough, sore throat) be tested for COVID-19, regardless of whether or not they have recently received the flu vaccine.

The current criteria for testing for healthcare workers, aged or residential care workers is:

If you have become unwell, even if you've recently received the flu vaccine, you should go home immediately and isolate in your home. If you fulfil criteria for testing, organise to be tested for COVID-19 and stay home until you have received your test results. You should notify your employer that you are unwell and are in isolation.

If your result is negative, you should remain at home until you are well enough to return to work. Keep your employer updated on your health status.

If you return a positive test result for COVID-19, you should follow the advice of your doctor and will be required to either isolate in your home or in a hospital until you are well.

¹ Australian Government Department of Health. Flu (influenza) immunisation service. <https://www.health.gov.au/health-topics/immunisation/immunisation-services/flu-influenza-immunisation-service#what-are-the-possible-side-effects-of-influenza-immunisation> (accessed 7 April 2020)

² World Health Organization. Information sheet: Observed rate of vaccine reactions – Influenza Vaccine. https://www.who.int/vaccine_safety/initiative/tools/Influenza_Vaccine_rates_information_sheet.pdf (accessed 7 April 2020)

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

Under the state and territory directions, 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 state and territory directions.

How will aged care providers know whether persons seeking to enter a service on an ad hoc basis (e.g. tradesmen) have been vaccinated against the flu?

Approved providers should **seek appropriate evidence of immunisation status** from individuals seeking to enter the residential aged care facility. Appropriate evidence may be a statement or record from a health practitioner; or an immunisation history statement available from Medicare online or the Express Plus Medicare mobile app.

Will aged care providers need to prove that a visitor has been vaccinated and keep records?

Approved providers should **seek appropriate evidence of immunisation status** from individuals seeking to enter the residential aged care facility. Appropriate evidence may be a statement or record from a health practitioner; or an immunisation history statement available from Medicare online or the Express Plus Medicare mobile app. Approved providers may also consider maintaining records to support effective administration and to substantiate their compliance with this requirement.

How will compliance with these requirements be assessed?

State and territory law enforcement agencies will enforce these directions. Persons who fail to comply with any of the directions could face penalties including fines for individuals and for bodies corporate.

Will residents still have the right to refuse vaccination?

While vaccination for all residents is important to protect themselves and others against flu, residents have the right to refuse vaccinations.

The flu vaccination requirements under state and territory directions do not apply to residents of a residential aged care facility.

Who can administer a flu vaccination?

Flu vaccinations prescribed by an authorised prescriber can be administered by the prescriber or a number of other health professionals including nurses, doctors or Aboriginal health professionals.

In some circumstances, flu vaccinations can also be administered by pharmacists where they have undertaken the appropriate education and training and are authorised to do so. All health professionals are required to practise in accordance with state/territory legislation and relevant policy.