

Residential Aged Care

Frequently Asked Questions – COVID-19

3 August 2020

We've added some extra questions and answers since the last version – these are marked with ****NEW****

Employee measures

Are your employees wearing masks, as recently recommended by the government?

As recommended by the Australian Government Department of Health and the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services, all staff in our Victorian aged care homes are now wearing masks while working with residents. We also require all visiting health professionals and representatives to wear a mask when in one of our homes.

From Tuesday, 4 August 2020, Australian Unity will also require the use of masks for all employees and visitors to Constitution Hill Aged Care as an additional precaution, given its location in Greater Western Sydney.

Do employees have their temperature checked daily?

Along with visitors and contractors, all of our employees are required to complete the COVID-19 entry and exit processes at each of our homes. Each time an employee comes to work to start their shift, they complete an entry process. This requires them to provide a declaration and have their temperature taken.

What are the hygiene measures in place for employees?

Mandatory training on infection prevention and control has been completed by our employees and ongoing training will continue during the pandemic. We also complete regular hand hygiene audits and health and safety 'toolbox talks' with our teams across all homes.

How is Australian Unity supporting employees, so they will get tested and stay at home if they're sick?

At the beginning of this pandemic we made a request to our people to not come to work if they're sick or have been in close contact with a person with a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19. They have also been asked to notify us if they get tested and as soon as they became aware of their result. To support this approach, Australian Unity has put specific arrangements in place to assist our employees, including access to COVID-19 special leave (in addition to regular personal and annual leave, which can also be accessed).

Do your employees work at multiple residential aged care homes?

We have asked our employees to let us know if they work for any other aged care providers—this could either be at another residential aged care home or as a community carer (ie in private homes). We maintain a register of secondary employment and we're keeping this updated as and when our employees disclose to us that they work across multiple employers. Following recent government announcements, we're actively engaging with our people to make sure Australian Unity is their primary/sole place of employment and we're also minimising our use of external agency staff as much as possible.

Are employees restricted to physically work / interact only within certain floors or households?

Under Australian Unity's Better Together TM model of care, employees are assigned to work within a specific household at each of our homes. This limits interaction between residents and employees from different households/areas of the home and supports infection control.

Should all employees at all homes be tested separate to an outbreak?

As you may have heard in the media, the current PCR test that is available for COVID-19 is only accurate at a 'point in time' — meaning the test result indicates whether or not a person had coronavirus at the time the swab collection was carried out. Receiving a negative test result doesn't mean that a person cannot contract coronavirus and return a positive test result at a future time.

There is also usually a delay of 24 to 72 hours between the swab being collected and the test results being received. So, while in an ideal world it would be great to be able to test all healthcare workers daily, this is currently not practically possible.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) use

****NEW** Do face coverings need to be worn if there is no outbreak in a residential aged care home?**

Yes, all staff and visitors in Victorian residential aged care homes are **required** to wear single use face masks (surgical masks).

From Tuesday, 4 August 2020, Australian Unity will also require the use of masks for all employees and visitors to Constitution Hill Aged Care as an additional precaution, given its location in Greater Western Sydney.

****NEW** Do masks need to be worn by residents leaving the home if there is no outbreak declared at that home?**

Yes, in the restricted areas of metropolitan Melbourne and Mitchell Shire, wearing a face covering when leaving your home is a requirement.

From 11:59pm on Sunday 2 August, face coverings become mandatory for all of Victoria.

****NEW** Do staff need to wear PPE when caring for or visiting the room of an asymptomatic resident in quarantine?**

All staff caring for or visiting the room of an asymptomatic resident in quarantine must wear full PPE, which includes goggles or a face shield.

****NEW** Do staff need to wear PPE when caring for a resident with suspected or confirmed COVID-19?**

All staff who enter the room of a resident who is in isolation with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 must wear full PPE at all times.

****NEW** Do visitors need to wear PPE?**

If the home they're visiting is in 'outbreak' status, then yes, visitors need to use the same precautions and wear the same PPE as our employees. This means, to the extent visitors can enter the home, they should wear full PPE if they are visiting asymptomatic residents in quarantine or residents in isolation with suspected or confirmed cases of COVID-19.

At all other times (ie when the home is not in 'outbreak'), visitors are required to comply with any requirements we've put in place or the government requires around PPE use while attending the home. At the current time, this means at least a face mask must be worn in Victorian homes.

****NEW** Where can I get more information?**

You can access more information from the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services [here](#) and from NSW Health [here](#).

Outbreak management plan

Do you have an outbreak management plan?

Yes, Australian Unity has had plans in place for some time now to ensure we can appropriately manage and respond to an outbreak of COVID-19 at one of our homes.

What happens if an employee tests positive to COVID-19?

Once an employee who tests positive advises us, we contact the Public Health Unit (PHU) for the relevant state. The PHU will then appoint a contact tracer to work with us to identify 'close contacts' of the affected employee. In addition, because aged care is regulated nationally, a case manager, clinical advisor/first responder and/or outbreak response team may also be appointed by the Australian Government Department of Health, in conjunction with the PHU, to assist us to manage the situation.

Any other employees who are identified as a close contact of the positive case would then be instructed to self-isolate at home and follow the directions of the PHU in relation to testing, etc. Any resident who is identified as a close contact would be asked to stay in their room and have a swab for COVID-19 taken, regardless of symptoms, as a precaution.

The current PHU position is that, if there is a positive case, all employees and residents who have been at the home in the past 14 days will be tested, with a repeat test completed in the following 72 hours.

What happens if a resident tests positive to COVID-19?

If a resident tests positive, a similar approach applies to the employee positive case approach described in the previous question. We would advise the PHU, support contact tracing to identify any close contacts and a case manager, clinical advisor/first responder and/or outbreak response team may be appointed.

The resident, who would likely have been asked to stay in their room from when the swab was collected, would remain in their room with a dedicated care team, who would be wearing full Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). Depending on their symptoms, and any other health conditions, discussions may take place with the resident, their General Practitioner and their family or loved ones about a transfer to hospital if needed.

If there is a positive case confirmed at my home, will residents be allowed to leave once in lockdown?

If a resident receives a positive test result at any Australian Unity residential aged care home, the PHU will provide specific guidance, as the home will then be in 'outbreak' status.

In general, transfers into and out of a home during an outbreak are minimised to the greatest extent possible (for example, admission of new residents is generally restricted and non-urgent external appointments are generally postponed). If a resident who has been tested and is negative, and who is not symptomatic, wished to be transferred to another setting (for example, to be cared for by their family in the community) this may be feasible by agreement.

Staying connected

How will families and residents be kept informed if there is a positive case at the home?

As we have done to date, we will ensure there is regular communication from Australian Unity with residents, representatives, families and friends. We also strongly encourage connectedness between you and your loved one during this time by phone or video conference.

What can families do during this time to provide support?

A key element of our Better Together TM philosophy is connection. Families and friends are encouraged to stay connected with residents as much as possible, to provide support and reassurance.

To support connectedness between you and your loved one during this time, our teams are at the ready to help facilitate virtual visits via telephone or video calls. As we've communicated previously, we also have our virtual visit app, CheckedIn Care, which can also be utilised. We have doubled the guest internet links at most aged care homes since March, and deployed additional hardware (iPads) to each home for resident use. We've also scheduled additional staffing to support electronic communication via FaceTime and CheckedIn Care since Easter.

Telephone charges are continuing to be waived across all of our homes and residents are encouraged to make outbound calls.

Older persons COVID-19 Support Line S

The Older Persons COVID-19 Support Line is a joint initiative of COTA Australia, Dementia Australia, National Seniors and the Older Persons Advocacy Network (OPAN), and is supported by funding from the Australian Government.

Older Australians, their families, friends and carers can freecall the support line if they:

- Would like to talk with someone about the COVID-19 restrictions and its impact on them
- Feel lonely or worry about a loved one
- Care for someone and need some information or someone to talk to
- Need advice or access to services
- Would like to arrange a one-off or regular wellbeing check for themselves, or someone else.

The support line is available on **1800 171 866**, 8.30am - 6pm AEST weekdays.