

Information for visitors to Residential Aged Care Facilities

Visiting residential aged care facilities

This factsheet will help you understand the requirements for visiting residential aged care facilities (RACF) in South Australia. These measures have been put in place to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and keep vulnerable members of our community well.

Visiting restrictions

Due to COVID-19, the State Coordinator made a [Direction](#) under the Emergency Management Act 2004 to limit entry into RACF in South Australia.

These measures have been put in place as a precaution to ensure vulnerable older South Australians continue to remain safe from COVID-19. It is important that all visitors practice good hand hygiene, cough and sneeze into their elbow or a tissue, and maintain social distancing of 1.5 metres.

Visits by family and friends

Currently, visits for the purpose of providing care and support to a resident (e.g. family and friends) are limited to a maximum of two visitors per day in RACF where less than 70% of residents have received a first dose of a COVID-19 vaccine. This may be two visits of one person each time, or one visit or two people together.

RACF with 70% or more of residents vaccinated against COVID-19 (with at least a first dose) are not impacted by these visitor restrictions and there are no restrictions on either the number of visitors a resident may receive or the duration visits.

Prior to visiting, family and friends are encouraged to contact the RACF to confirm any limitations for that facility.

Other people permitted to visit

- > People undertaking prospective resident visits.
- > People providing goods or services necessary for the effective operation of the facility, or other professional services at the facility (such as hairdressing or advocacy).
- > People providing health, medical or pharmaceutical services to a resident.
- > Emergency management and law enforcement personnel.
- > Legal practitioner providing legal advice or services.
- > People undertaking regulatory functions or duties, including officers from the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission undertaking inspections.
- > People participating in a group activity led or supervised by an employee, contractor, student or volunteer of the facility.

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Prohibited visitors

Until further notice, you are not permitted to enter or remain on the premises of a RACF in SA if:

- > You have been a close contact of a positive COVID-19 case within the last 14 days.
- > You have a fever (>38), or have a history of fever and chills in the past 72 hours, or symptoms of acute respiratory infection (e.g. cough, sore throat, runny nose, shortness of breath) or loss of taste or smell or diarrhoea and vomiting.
- > You have undertaken a COVID-19 test and are awaiting the test result, unless you submitted to the COVID-19 test in accordance with routine surveillance.
- > You have not been vaccinated against seasonal influenza.
- > You have not been vaccinated against COVID-19 (from 6 December 2021). This includes at least two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine and a booster if you are eligible.

Undertaking visits safely

The RACF is responsible for putting processes in place to ensure that residents are able to receive visitors safely. You must follow the instructions given by staff about how and when visits can take place.

- > A person (other than a resident or a child under 12 years) must not enter or remain on the premises of a RACF, unless the person is **wearing a face mask** (covering mouth and nose) at all times when in the physical presence of other persons. The requirement for a mask does not apply:
 - o when the person is eating or drinking;
 - o the wearing of a mask will hinder the provision of the relevant care and/or impact resident safety or wellbeing;
 - o by a person who has a relevant medical condition, including problems with their breathing, a serious condition of the face, a disability or a mental health condition; or
 - o in circumstances where the ability to see the mouth is essential for communication, such as to enable communication by or with any person who is deaf or hard of hearing.
- > It is recommended (not mandatory) that children are encouraged to wear a mask when visiting a RACF if appropriate in the circumstances and they are able to do so, as they are not currently able to be vaccinated. Children under the age of 2 should not wear a mask or face covering.
- > Anyone entering a RACF, including employees, contractors, volunteers and visitors, must check-in using [COVID Safe Check-In](#) (QR Code) upon entry to capture their relevant contact details. If they are not able to use the COVID Safe Check-In, they must sign in using a paper record.
- > All visitors will be screened upon entry to ensure they do not fall within any of the prohibited categories.
- > Visitors should adhere to physical distancing of 1.5m wherever possible, particularly in communal areas being used by other residents, staff and visitors.
- > Practice good hand hygiene – wash regularly with soap and water or an alcohol based rub.
- > Practice proper coughing etiquette – cover coughs and sneezes with your elbow or a tissue.

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- > Any person providing care to a resident who has undertaken a COVID-19 test must wear appropriate PPE when providing care to that resident until the test result is known.

Compassionate visits

Visits for the purpose of providing end of life support are permitted, including by children. Operators of residential aged care facilities have been asked to take particular care to balance the need to protect residents, staff and others from the risk of transmission of COVID-19, while supporting the rights and wellbeing of residents and their families.

- > Compassionate visits should be given to people in palliative care and those nearing end of life. Under the Direction, 'end of life' is defined as a person for whom death is imminent (likely within 2 weeks). Visits for the purpose of providing end of life support to a resident are permitted and numbers of visitors are not restricted in these circumstances.
- > Visitors who are providing end of life support to a resident are permitted to visit if they have not yet received their COVID-19 or flu vaccination, however, they must take all reasonable steps to get vaccinated as soon as practicable after their initial visit.
- > Visitors who have not been vaccinated against COVID-19 must wear appropriate PPE at all times while attending the RACF to provide end of life support.

Visitors during COVID-19 outbreaks

Wherever possible, processes should be put in place to ensure that residents are able to receive essential visitors safely during an outbreak.

For further information, refer to the [Industry Code for Visiting Residential Aged Care Homes during COVID-19](#) and the [Interim Guidance for the management of COVID-19 Outbreak in Residential Aged Care Facilities](#).

Flu vaccination requirements

From 1 June 2021, you must be vaccinated against 2021 seasonal influenza in order to visit a RACF in SA.

The only exemptions to this requirement are:

- > If you have a medical contraindication to the flu vaccine (such as a person who has a history of anaphylaxis or has had Guillain-Barré Syndrome following vaccination, or who is taking check point inhibitor medication for cancer treatment).
 - You will need to provide the RACF with a letter from a medical practitioner to confirm this before they will allow you to visit.
- > If all reasonable steps have been taken to access the flu vaccine and it is not reasonably available.
- > Infants aged 6 months or younger.

Visitors will be asked to provide evidence of their immunisation status when visiting. Appropriate evidence may include a statement or record from a health practitioner, or an immunisation history statement available from Medicare online or the Express Plus Medicare mobile app.

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COVID-19 vaccination requirements

From 6 December 2021, you must be vaccinated against COVID-19 in order to visit a RACF in SA. From 29 January 2022, this includes two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine and a booster vaccine if you are eligible.

The only exemptions to this requirement are:

- > the person is aged 12 years and 2 months or less.
- > the person has a medical certificate or letter from a legally qualified medical practitioner certifying that the person:
 - has a medical exemption from receiving a TGA approved COVID-19 vaccine on either a permanent or temporary basis in accordance with the guidelines published from time to time by ATAGI; or
 - has a medical exemption on either a permanent or temporary basis from receiving the preferred vaccine as recommended by ATAGI for the person's age; or
 - has an appointment to be assessed by a medical specialist or has commenced an assessment with a medical specialist to determine whether they have a medical exemption from receiving a COVID-19 vaccine on either a permanent or temporary basis in accordance with the guidelines published from time to time by ATAGI.

The certificate or letter must clearly outline the reason for the exemption and the exemption must be endorsed by the Chief Public Health Officer or her delegate (which must be provided to the operator of the RACF).

Requesting an exemption

1. You will need to get a medical certificate from a qualified medical practitioner that clearly outlines the reason for an exemption in line with the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) guideline: www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/atagi-expanded-guidance-on-temporary-medical-exemptions-for-covid-19-vaccines
2. Your medical practitioner must complete an [SA Health Chief Public Health Officer Immunisation Exemption Application Form](#).
3. Submit your completed form and medical certificate to Health.NJNPExemptions@sa.gov.au.
4. Your application for an exemption must be approved by the Chief Public Health Officer (CPHO). If approved, the CPHO will provide a signed exemption letter that can be provided to the RACF.

Window visits

If you have not been vaccinated against seasonal influenza or COVID-19, you may be offered a 'window visit' to stay in contact with your loved one. These visits are allowed in the following circumstances:

- > You must remain on the outdoor side of the closed window, with the resident to remain indoors.
- > Social distancing must be maintained at all times and there must be no contact with other visitors or staff on the premises.

While flu and COVID-19 vaccination are highly encouraged for residents, residents of a RACF have the right to refuse to be vaccinated.

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Declared outbreaks in RACF: Self-quarantine period

A COVID-19 outbreak is declared in a RACF when:

- > Two or more residents of a RACF have been diagnosed with COVID-19 via rapid antigen test (RAT) or PCR test within 5 days and has been onsite at the RACF at any time during their infectious period: or
- > Five or more staff, visitors and/or residents of the RACF diagnosed with COVID-19 through RAT or PCR test within past 7 days who worked/visited during their infections period.

The infectious period is generally considered to commence 48 hours prior to symptom onset or test date if asymptomatic, and to last for 7 days.

In the event of a COVID-19 outbreak, a prescribed authorised officer may declare a prescribed self-quarantine period in relation to the RACF, ending at the time declared by the prescribed authorised officer.

During a prescribed self-quarantine period, residents are prohibited from leaving the RACF, except in the following circumstances:

- > for urgent medical or dental treatment; or
- > for transfer to hospital; or
- > for transfer to another RACF determined to be suitable by an authorised officer; or
- > in order to self-quarantine at another location, including a family home, approved by an authorised officer.

Note: *nothing in the Direction authorises the provision of treatment of a resident that is contrary to a relevant Advanced Care Directive.*

If a resident is approved to leave the RACF to self-quarantine at a family home or other suitable location during a prescribed self-quarantine period, others residing at that location who are deemed close contacts will also be required to quarantine.

Staying in touch

It is important to stay in regular touch with family and friends in residential aged care. In addition to visiting, this can include writing a letter, sending a postcard, talking over the phone, or video calling.

Further information

For information, advice and resources, visit www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/covidagedcare.

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For more information

Office for Ageing Well
Department for Health and Wellbeing
SA Health, Government of South Australia
www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/covidagedcare

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