

Guidance for residential aged care facilities

COVID-19 safe festive season 2021



Purpose

The COVID-19 outbreak in NSW in 2021 has been a difficult and challenging time for all in our community, but particularly for our older residents in aged care facilities.

This guidance provides some tips and reminders for residential aged care providers when hosting festive events and activities in their facility.

Being prepared means your facility and residents can enjoy this time, while remaining COVID-Safe.

Important!

This advice may be subject to change at short notice. Currently, NSW Health is closely monitoring the evolving situation in relation to the Omicron variant and will continue to issue regular guidance to residential aged care facilities when required.

Please ensure to stay up to date with the latest health advice, particularly over the festive period. The most up to date information can be found: www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/covid-19/Pages/aged-care.aspx

All advice outlined in this document must be followed in line with NSW Public Health Orders. As always, if a resident or staff member has symptoms of COVID-19 over the festive season, they should get tested immediately and self-isolate until a negative result is received.

Stay COVID safe over the festive season

Residents who received their second dose of a COVID-19 vaccine at least five months ago are eligible to receive a booster dose. A booster dose can be received in a Commonwealth in-reach clinic or through their GP. Facilities are encouraged to ensure residents receive a third dose as soon as they are eligible.

Mask recommendations

Regardless of the requirement for mask wearing in NSW public health orders, public health advice will continue to strongly recommend that staff and visitors wear masks while indoors in aged care facilities.

Entering the facility and screening requirements

All visitors must adhere to the usual entry and screening requirements. **Exclude** any visitors who:

- Are not fully vaccinated against COVID-19 at least 14 days prior to visiting, except for children under 12 years.
- Have COVID-19 symptoms.
- Have had a COVID-19 test and are waiting on the test result.
- Are a close or casual contact of a person with confirmed COVID-19 unless they have completed their self-isolation and testing requirements.

- Are under a self-isolation order
- Have been to a [country of concern in the last 14 days](#)
- Have been to any other countries in the last 14 days, unless they are:
Fully vaccinated and at least 7 days have passed since their arrival in NSW and they have received a result from their day 6 test.

Records of all guests, staff and volunteers entering your facility must be kept, through the QR Code check-in process.

Remember:

- Loved ones are not limited in the time that they spend with their spouse/relative, unless the activity is in a communal area of the facility (refer to the Industry Code advice in these instances).
- Visitation numbers must be in line with the requirements under the current Public Health Order.
- Up to two children under 12 years of age can enter a residential aged care facility, provided they are accompanied by a fully vaccinated adult. Children should have a negative rapid antigen test on the day the visit takes place where possible.

Physical distancing

Physical distancing is important to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19. Residential aged care facilities should have a plan for physical distancing during a festive season event. It is important to reduce the potential for crowding and the risk of environmental contamination in the facility.

Facilities should ensure that visitors stay within their groups, limit physical movement around the facility, and that there is at least 1.5 metres (minimum) between groups. Facilities should also avoid activities that require queuing (or consider using floor markers).

Where physical distancing is not possible, facilities should make plans to spread the event over more than one occasion, reduce the number of visitors to the event, and utilise outdoor locations of the premises.

Hygiene and infection control

As with usual entry requirements, all visitors must follow hand hygiene processes.

It is especially important during the festive season to ensure that hand sanitizing stations are located at appropriate locations, that you have adequate stocks of hand sanitizers, soap, hot water, paper towels, and signage is displayed.

If your facility plans on holding an event please ensure:

- High touch surfaces are regularly wiped down other shared spaces (e.g. toilets) are regularly cleaned
- Consider games and activities that involve use of a person's own equipment to minimise cross-contamination
- Plan for enhanced cleaning after the event.

Holding an event

Facilities may hold an event like a musical performance such as choirs, carol singers or musicians. Facilities must ensure that:

- All performers are fully vaccinated
- Performers must complete a rapid antigen test on the day and prior to entry (this could be a home test)
- Performers are subject to entry and screening requirements, and physical distancing requirements, and these are communicated to them in advance
- Masks are strongly recommended
- Allow your staff enough time to effectively undertake the entry and screening process
- Where possible events should be held outside but in the event of an indoor event this should be in a well ventilated space that supports physical distancing
- Consider holding several smaller events for safe physical distancing or offer alternative options for residents to participate such as video streaming from a residents' rooms.

Meals

Facilities need to take steps to reduce cross-contamination during meal times. These include:

- Minimising shared implements, utensils or condiments

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- Avoiding shared platters, and using plated or boxed meals instead
 - Ensure physical distancing between groups in communal areas – prioritise outdoor dining options and consider holding the event on different days and times
 - Consider minimising groups from different households seated together.

Individual outings and group excursions

Residents can leave the facility and attend family gatherings or for other reasons such as group excursions organised by the facility, but must abide by the Public Health (COVID-19 General Order) 2021 as outlined in existing NSW Health advice:

- Facilities are to ensure that residents are provided with appropriate personal protective equipment, infection control and mask wearing advice when they leave the facility.
- Residents are to be guided about COVID safe behaviours, including physical distancing and hand hygiene.
- The event complies with the current Public Health (COVID-19 19 General Order) 2021.
- Families of residents must also consider advice here when taking their loved ones out of the facility to attend family gatherings. Families may wish to voluntarily have a test (e.g. rapid antigen test) prior to the event

There is no requirement for COVID-19 testing or self-isolation for residents on return to the facility from an outing, unless they develop signs or symptoms of COVID-19. However, testing (e.g. rapid antigen testing) may be considered for any resident returning from a large family gathering 5-7 days after the event.

We wish
you a
safe and
enjoyable
festive
period

