

COVID-19: No 1

The following Q&A sheet has been developed to assist family/advocates and friends and loved ones.

As you can appreciate things are changing on a minute by minute basis, but we will keep you up to date as information comes to hand. Email is the most effective way for us to communicate quickly and directly with you – so please ensure you are checking in regularly and communicating with other family/advocates for your loved one to ensure you are all receiving this information.

Should I be concerned and what have we done to mitigate the risk of infection to residents?

We all need to be extra vigilant. These are unprecedented times; however, we do know that aged care facilities are amongst the safest in the community because they have well established infection control measures and systems in place.

COVID-19 is a contagious viral infection that causes mild respiratory illness in most people. Presentations can range from no symptoms to severe illness with potentially life-threatening complications, particularly in people who are elderly, vulnerable to infections and/or have co-morbidities.

Transmission is through contact with respiratory droplets containing the virus, produced when an infectious individual coughs or sneezes. This is why it is so important that staff with colds stay away from work.

Most of us will be ok if we don't have complex medical conditions which many of our residents experience. Therefore in order to protect our residents everyone needs to follow rigid infection control measures; that is, wash your hands often, maintain social distancing (1.5 metres), practise respiratory hygiene, avoid touching your eyes, mouth and nose and isolate yourself if you are sick or have been in contact with someone who has COVID-19.

Given the elderly are most at risk from the devastating complications of this virus Shepparton Villages has closed its facilities to the community. We have made some exceptions for residents who are palliative and those who need to see a family member face to face urgently, however permission must be obtained prior to entry and these visitors must follow strict infection control measures.

The decision to close the facilities to the community was not an easy one, however we need to protect the most vulnerable, our residents.

What do residents who are returning from community appointments or hospitals need to do?

Residents should not attend appointments unless they are absolutely essential. In these cases, the resident is to be taken to the appointment directly by a staff member then returned immediately and upon entry undertake all infection control procedures.

Whilst staff are escorting residents to appointments they are to carry hand sanitizer and ensure resident and themselves maintain social distancing whilst in community.

All non-essential appointments need to be cancelled until further notice.

Can residents leave facilities to go on social outings?

No, at this point of time no resident can go on social leave due to the risk of coming into contact with the virus then bringing this back into the facility.

Who may enter our facilities and who may not?

Only essential services will be able to enter a residential care facility. Essential services include clinical staff, food and hotel services staff, specialist nurses, GP's, specialists, allied health services and our hairdressers.

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Contractors may enter for essential services if given permission from the Projects and Maintenance Manager, however, on entering must follow infection control measures, take the most direct route to problem, don't touch walls or handrails and leave the facility as soon as possible and not engage with residents or wander the facility.

Special exceptions will be given to families with palliative loved ones. The care manager of the facility will contact you and discuss how you enter as you must follow strict infection control measures.

If a visitor or contractor is permitted to enter where and what can they do?

At this stage only families with palliative loved ones and essential services contractors are allowed into the facility. All visitors must obtain prior approval to enter from the Executive Manager Care Services or CEO. Contractors must obtain permission from the Maintenance Manager. All visitors must adhere to the following precautions:

- Maximum of two visitors at one time per day.
- Visitation to be conducted within the resident's room, not in public places.
- Visitors must be escorted to the room and not touch walls and/or handrails.
- Visitors must remain in the resident's room and take the shortest exit when leaving.
- Visits must be short; no longer than 1 hour.
- Visitors must follow all infection control measures as instructed. ie wash hands on entry, whilst visiting and on exit.
- No entry to anyone who has been overseas within the past 14 days.
- No entry to anyone who has had contact with COVID-19 within the past 14 days.
- No entry to anyone with a fever or flu-like symptoms.
- No entry to children under 16.
- After 1 May 2020, no entry to anyone, including staff who have not had an influenza vaccination.
- All visitors must practise social distancing of 1.5 metres.

Can we admit new residents?

Yes, at the moment. However, all new residents must isolate for 14 days in their room to ensure there is no sign of cold like symptoms. Meals will be served in their room.

New admissions will only be able to bring in basic needs until further notice. Basic items include clothes, toiletry items and basic personal items that do not require trollies etc.

Are we admitting residents on respite?

Yes, but as per above, that resident will need to isolate for 14 days in their room to ensure there is no sign of cold like symptoms, and meals will be served in their room.

What does social distancing mean in a residential aged care facility?

All residents are to maintain 1.5 metres between each other where possible. This includes during activities and within the dining room. We understand this may be difficult.

Dining rooms and mealtimes may need to be amended to accommodate this.

What does social distancing mean for Staff?

Everyone is to maintain safe 1.5m social distancing everywhere they go. This is difficult when undertaking personal care however I have asked all staff to follow this rigidly when out in the community. I have also asked that staff limit community exposure; that is, only go to the shops if they really need to, limit travel, limit visits to others, limit visitors into their home and limit the number of people they come into contact with in the community. This is a huge ask of our staff, but we trust that they are following all precautions.

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Can visitors stay for lunch?

No. While we are closed to the community, this is not possible.

Can we still do activities in the facilities?

Yes, our lifestyle staff will continue to conduct small group activities adhering to infection control measures, including social distancing. They will also be looking at other ways to help residents stay in touch with families.

How long will the facilities be closed to the community?

At this stage we do not know, however we will be reviewing these measures constantly as we understand social engagement is very important to both residents and their loved ones. However, please understand the guidelines on social distancing are changing constantly due to the unprecedented environment we currently live in.

We have put these measures in to place for now, and our management team is meeting daily to review and update the situation.

What if there is a COVID-19 case at Shepparton villages?

If COVID-19 is confirmed in a facility – we will immediately activate our infectious emergency management plan which is overseen by our emergency management team.

Can families/representatives drop off items for their loved ones?

Yes – if families or representatives have items they wish to give to their loved one, they can place them in a plastic bag, clearly marked with the resident's name and contact the facility by phone to arrange a drop off time.

These are challenging times however we ask all that we work together to protect our residents and the staff who care for these residents.

What are you doing to help residents keep in touch with families/advocates?

We are working with families to facilitate contact via phone or through FaceTime and Skype, and other applications as much as is practical. We have limited iPads in facilities, so families are welcome to provide an iPad or tablet – with sim card to their loved one.

We are also putting together a Communications Plan for Family/Advocates that will allow families to make appointments to see their loved one through windows, while talking on phones etc. This will take a little time to put together but we will work with you to ensure this can happen.

What can I do to help my loved one?

Keep in touch via phone, FaceTime or Skype as often as you can. Work with our staff to set this up if you are having difficulty but please understand we have limited resources and staff are first and foremost working on care and infection control. Lifestyle and activities staff will be working with admissions and ACFI staff to assist residents with technology.

Keep up to date by checking your emails for updates and visiting our website and Facebook pages.

Write letters! You can drop off a letter to a resident at any time, there will be drop off boxes available at each site.

Call us at any time if you have any concerns, (03) 58 320 800.

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Who can I talk to if I'm concerned?

Please contact your facility to assist with any day to day inquiries. If you need to visit a loved one urgently you must first obtain permission from the Executive Manager Care Services Sarah Gaunt 0411 877 610, or CEO Kerri Rivett 0477 320 800. However, at this time, these visits are limited to palliative and end of life residents only.

These are difficult times and we fully understand that closing the facilities to families and or their loved ones may cause some anxiety to both you and your loved one. However, we believe based on the best available evidence to us, that this is the best intervention to mitigate the risk of your loved one coming into contact with someone with COVID-19.

Kerri Rivett

CEO