

COVID-19 visitor restriction recommendations for aged residential care

The Ministry of Health recommends that visits to aged residential care (ARC) settings are limited, in order to protect residents from COVID-19. ARC residents are one of the most vulnerable populations if an outbreak of COVID-19 occurs. Published findings from reports of COVID-19 outbreaks in long-term care facilities suggest a high attack rate among residents, staff and visitors. Implementing proactive measures will assist with preventing the introduction of COVID-19 in ARC facilities. These recommendations are aligned with levels 2–4 of the national COVID-19 alert system for those aged 70 and over to stay home to avoid contracting the virus.

Restrict whānau and other visitors

The following groups should be restricted from visiting residents:

- family/whānau
- friends
- non-essential visitors and volunteers
- non-essential health care workers.

Exceptions to whānau and visitor restrictions

Certain compassionate care situations such as palliative care or end-of-life situations are exempt from these restrictions. Exemptions will be made on a case-by-case basis by facility management and the consulting doctor or nurse practitioner. Visitors need to be screened when entering the facility according to the staff and resident screening recommendations (Refer to the 'Managed restricted access to aged care facilities' section on the [COVID-19 – information for aged care providers website](#)).

Visitors will be required to wear a face mask and wash hands upon entry to the facility. Cough etiquette and hand hygiene should be strictly followed.

Restricting resident activities

Physical distancing of residents means limiting people from being in close proximity to each other for periods of time. A distance of at least two metres apart will prevent spread of the respiratory virus that causes COVID-19. The list below includes activities that should be limited or stopped while there is a COVID-19 outbreak in New Zealand.

- Cancel trips into the community.
- Make changes to dining services within the facility:
 - Restrict communal dining if physical distancing (at least two metres apart) cannot be maintained (eg, separatē tables as far as possible)
 - if unable to maintain physical distancing residents should be brought into the dining area in intervals. This means the number of meal services may need to be increased to accommodate all residents
 - Provide in-room meal services for those residents capable of feeding themselves without supervision or consider other assistance.

- Restrict resident group activities within the facility.
- If physical distancing (at least two metres apart) can be maintained, residents can congregate in the same room for activities.
- Cancel activities with outside volunteers (eg, bands/choirs, pet therapists etc.).

Communication to residents, whānau and friends

Communicate these new temporary restrictions to all residents, whānau, and staff. Explaining that these temporary measures are to protect to residents' whānau, and friends is crucial for compliance.

Posting a notice at the main entrance informs visitors of the restrictions if they haven't already been communicated through other methods.

Identify and facilitate alternative forms of communication such as video, phone and other online methods for residents to connect with whānau and friends. This may help reduce anxiety caused by visitor restrictions.

Information on COVID-19

What is coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and how is it spread?

COVID-19 is a new viral disease that has resulted in a global pandemic. The virus can be spread from person to person from infected people through coughing, sneezing or by germs on hands.

What are the symptoms and who is at risk?

Most patients have had fever, cough and shortness of breath. Patients with more severe disease have had evidence of pneumonia (chest infection). This is changing quickly and readers are referred to the Ministry of Health website listed below. The elderly and people with underlying illnesses (such as diabetes, lung disease, kidney disease or suppressed immunity) are at risk of severe illness or death if they get COVID-19.

More information

For the latest advice, information and resources, go to

[Ministry of Health COVID-19 webpage](#)

[Unite against COVID-19 website](#)

For specific questions about a resident or staff member's health related to COVID-19, call Healthline on 0800 358 5453. It operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week.