



ACT
Government

ACT Health

A message to church leaders and spiritual support workers in the ACT regarding COVID-19 visitor restrictions for Aged Care Facilities including the requirement to be vaccinated against influenza

Australia is doing well to control the transmission of COVID-19 and there is currently no evidence of community transmission in the ACT; however, it is important for the community to remain vigilant.

People in residential aged care are vulnerable to severe COVID-19 disease because they are older and often suffer from chronic health conditions, so the protection of these elderly people remains a key priority. On 21 April 2020 the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) issued a [statement for residential aged care facilities about minimising the impact of COVID-19](#). This included restricting entry to residential aged care facilities to protect residents. The ACT's Chief Health Officer has issued a [Public Health Direction](#) to put this advice into effect in the ACT. Aged care facilities have also undertaken important work to put these protections in place.

Another component of the public health direction is that, after 1 May 2020, people entering an aged care facility **must be vaccinated with the 2020 influenza vaccine and provide evidence of vaccination to the aged care facility before entry**. Appropriate evidence of vaccination may include a statement or record from a health practitioner or an immunisation history statement from Medicare online or the Express Plus Medicare mobile app. Importantly, this requirement applies to anyone providing end of life care, as well as for more routine visitors.

The influenza vaccine helps to protect both the vaccinated person and other people, especially people who are too sick or too young to be vaccinated or who may not be able to develop a strong immune response from the influenza vaccine; this includes the elderly. The more people who are vaccinated in the community, the less likely the disease will spread. Reducing the burden of influenza in the community and on the healthcare system is paramount during the COVID-19 epidemic.

If you will need to visit a resident in a residential aged care facility and you are not already vaccinated against influenza, please arrange to have your influenza vaccine as soon as possible. Details on where to get vaccinated are available from the [ACT Health Website](#). We would appreciate you sharing this important information with anyone in your organisation who may be involved in visiting or providing spiritual support to aged care residents.

If there is a case of COVID-19 and/or an outbreak of COVID-19 in an aged care facility, further tightening of visitor restrictions may be appropriate for public health reasons. More information is provided about the current visitor restrictions overleaf.

Aged Care Facility Visitor Restrictions

Visits for spiritual support to a residential aged care facility can occur if:

- The visit is for the purposes of a care and support visit to a resident of the aged care facility on a particular day and is the only care and support visit made to the resident on that day, including visits made by family and friends. These visits must be limited to 2 hours duration.

or

- The visit is for the purposes of providing end of life support for a resident of the aged care facility.

However, you cannot visit an aged care facility if you:

- have returned from overseas in the last 14 days;
- have been in contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19 in the last 14 days;
- have a temperature higher than 37.5 degrees or symptoms of acute respiratory infection such as a cough, sore throat, or shortness of breath; or
- have not had your 2020 influenza vaccination, unless you have a documented medical contraindication to receiving the vaccination. Further information is available on the [ACT Health website](#).

Visit Restrictions

If you visit an aged care facility, you need to reduce the risk of transmission by:

- Keeping your visit in a resident's room, outdoors, or in a specific area designated by the aged care facility, rather than communal areas; and
- Practicing physical distancing by maintaining a distance of 1.5 metres where possible.



Dr Vanessa Johnston
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ACT Health

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