

# General **Communique**

## Communicable Diseases Branch

Queensland Public Health and Scientific Services (QPHaSS)



Email [CDMU@health.qld.gov.au](mailto:CDMU@health.qld.gov.au)

## Residential care facilities: Acute respiratory infections (ARI) April 2025

### Key messages for ARI prevention

All Queenslanders have a role to play in ARI prevention by following these key messages:

- **Get your FREE vaccinations** in 2025 for influenza, RSV and COVID-19 - if you are eligible.
- **Stay at home** when you are sick (including keeping sick children home from school or childcare)
- **Clean your hands** regularly and thoroughly with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand rub.
- If you need to leave the house while unwell, **maintain physical distance** from others and **consider wearing a mask** when you cannot physically distance.
- **Practice good respiratory hygiene** by:
  - coughing or sneezing into a tissue or the inside of your elbow
  - discarding used tissues immediately in a bin, and
  - cleaning your hands thoroughly.
- **Clean frequently touched surfaces** such as door handles, tapware, tabletops, remote controls, mobile devices (e.g., phones, laptops etc.), benchtops and fridge doors and clean your hands after cleaning.
- **Ensure good ventilation** by opening windows and doors and spending time outside in the fresh air each day.

Email [CDMU@health.qld.gov.au](mailto:CDMU@health.qld.gov.au)

# Prepare, Protect, Identify, Respond

Many residents in residential care facilities (RCFs), including disability support services, are at higher risk of severe illness from ARIs including:

- people aged 65 years and older,
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people,
- people with heart disease, chronic lung conditions, kidney or liver disease, diabetes, obesity, chronic neurological conditions, blood disorders, immunocompromising conditions, and other chronic conditions that need regular medical follow-up or hospitalisation.

Residential care facility providers should prepare early to protect their residents and staff from ARIs, and manage outbreaks efficiently if they occur, by following the advice below.

## PREPARE – Infection prevention and control saves lives

Develop and implement a Winter Plan including vaccination provision, Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) and other consumables stockpile, outbreak management, anti-viral treatment, testing and workforce contingencies.

- Provide annual infection control training to all staff and ensure staff are familiar with clinical management pathways and outbreak management. Monitor hand hygiene and PPE practice.

## PROTECT – Vaccinate staff and residents

- Actively promote the benefits of COVID-19 and annual influenza vaccinations to staff, contractors, residents, volunteers and visitors.\*
- Ensure all staff, including students and volunteers, are up-to-date with their COVID-19 vaccination and encourage annual influenza vaccination.\*
- Consider recommending RSV vaccination for adults aged 60 years and above and especially those aged  $\geq 75$  years as they are more at risk of severe RSV disease. Prepare early for your annual influenza vaccination program. Consider offering COVID-19 booster vaccinations concurrently.
- Isolate symptomatic residents and exclude all symptomatic staff and visitors from the facility.
- \*Note eligibility criteria below:
  - Free influenza vaccination is available for all Queenslanders; 6 months of age and older.
  - Free COVID-19 booster doses (further doses) every 6 or 12 months are recommended, or can be considered, based on an individual's age and presence of risk factors for severe disease. The [COVID-19 booster eligibility checker](#) can be used to check eligibility.
  - Two RSV vaccines are available on the private market for adults aged 60 years or older. Individuals should discuss their suitability for this vaccine with their healthcare provider. More information can be found [here](#).

## IDENTIFY – Monitor for outbreaks and notify early

- Actively monitor staff and residents for symptoms of ARI

- When ARI symptoms are detected in a single resident, isolate the resident and initiate procedures as per your Outbreak Management Plan.
- Declare an outbreak and notify the local Public Health Unit (PHU) when:
  - Two or more residents test positive to either COVID-19, RSV or influenza within a 72-hour period OR
  - Two or more epidemiologically-linked ARIs in residents, where influenza, RSV and COVID-19 have been excluded, within a 72-hour period.
- Consider your reporting requirements for COVID-19 cases: [Managing a COVID-19 outbreak in residential aged care | Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care.](#)

## RESPOND – Seek support and respond rapidly

- An early and rapid outbreak response reduces the number of ill residents and staff.
- Contact your local PHU early for advice and resources on managing outbreaks.

## Vaccination requirements and visitor restrictions

Everyone entering a residential care facility should be asymptomatic and be encouraged to be vaccinated against influenza and COVID-19 to provide the best protection for the residents. Decisions about vaccination requirements of entry and visiting restrictions during outbreaks are the responsibility of the facility owner or operator and should comply with the [Industry Code for Visiting in Aged Care Homes](#).

## Suggested strategies to increase staff vaccination:

- Ensure all staff working all shifts can access free vaccines.
- Actively promote individual and public health vaccination benefits by providing education and written information
- Provide staff information that clearly links staff vaccination policies to broader infection control policies and staff health programs.
- Provide appropriate incentives and recognition for vaccinated staff. early and rapid outbreak response reduces the number of ill residents and staff.

## Resources for residential aged care facilities

- [National Guideline for the Prevention, Control and Public Health Management of Outbreaks of Acute Respiratory Infection in Residential Aged Care Homes | Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care](#)
- [Winter Plan for RCFs](#)
- [Disease prevention in residential care facilities](#)
- [Prevent and prepare for COVID-19 in residential aged care | Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care](#)
- [Information for aged care providers, workers and residents about COVID-19 vaccines](#)
- [COVID-19 advice for people in residential aged care home and visitors](#)
- [Queensland Public Health Units](#)
- [Managing infectious diseases in aged care | Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care](#)