

# COVID Safe festive season in residential aged care

## Context

People aged 70 years and over, people with compromised immune systems, and people with some chronic medical conditions are at greater risk of more serious illness from COVID-19. People living in communal settings may also be at greater risk of infection. Given the higher vulnerability of residents in aged care, Queensland has imposed restrictions on aged care which aim to protect residents.

So that everyone can have a good time and stay safe, this factsheet outlines some reminders for residential aged care providers when holding events and activities over the festive holiday season for residents in their home.

## What does the festive season look like in aged care?

Usually, facilities hold a resident Christmas lunch on Christmas day as well as other events including:

- morning/afternoon teas
- performances and entertainment e.g. musicians, carol singers, choirs
- luncheons
- Christmas parties — with finger food or platters
- visits from Santa Claus and gift giving
- Christmas lights bus tours.

## Purpose

This document provides principles to help facilities take steps to ensure that residents, staff and family can enjoy festive celebrations, while remaining COVID Safe.

## Key principles for COVID Safe events in residential aged care facilities

### Entering the facility

It is extremely important that anyone visiting a residential aged care facility, including the outside grounds of the facility, adhere to the normal entry and screening processes. This includes ensuring that entry is refused to any visitor, volunteer, performer or contractor who:

- is unwell
- has returned from overseas in the last 14 days
- has had contact with a person with COVID-19 in the last 14 days
- has travelled to a COVID-19 hotspot in the last 14 days
- has a fever (37.5 degrees Celsius or more)
- has a cough, runny nose, sore throat, shortness of breath, loss of taste, loss of smell, diarrhoea, nausea, vomiting or fatigue
- has had a COVID-19 test and is waiting on the test result

When entering the facility, all visitors must follow hand hygiene processes e.g. using alcohol-based hand rub or thorough hand washing.

Good records of all guests, staff and volunteers entering the facility must be kept, including contact details and dates and times they were at the facility.

### Caveat

This fact sheet has been prepared on the basis that Queensland continues to experience low levels of community transmission and no unlinked cases of COVID-19. If circumstances change, new Public Health Directions or restrictions may be imposed and may impact or supersede the advice in this fact sheet.

Keeping older Queenslanders safe from COVID-19 continues to be a key priority.

## Plan for physical distancing between groups

It is important to reduce crowding and environmental contamination in the facility during the event.

- Physical distancing is important. Facilities should ensure:
  - visitors stay within their family groups and limit physical movement around the facility
  - there is adequate (at least 1.5 metres) space between groups.
- Where physical distancing is not possible facilities should:
  - use outdoor spaces — gardens, verandahs and so on
  - reduce the number of visitors invited to the event
  - consider setting up events in groups to provide adequate physical distancing so that all residents can spend time with their visiting families and friends.



## Performers and volunteers

Many Christmas events will include a musical or other performance such as choirs or carol singers. Facilities should consider the following:

- performers should be made aware of entry requirements (e.g. requirement for influenza vaccination) well in advance
- allowing enough time to ensure all entry processes (screening check, signing in, verifying influenza vaccination etc.) for performers and volunteers can be thoroughly undertaken
- indoor events and activities that include singing are discouraged (for example roaming choirs)
- outdoor events that include singing should be organised so there is adequate spacing between visiting household groups and good ventilation
- performances should be arranged so that people are not encouraged to gather at a single point
- performers should always maintain physical distancing from residents, visitors and staff, whilst performing.

Where there are visits from Santa Claus, facilities should ensure that Santa:

- undergoes the same screening as all other visitors when entering the facility
- observes strict hand hygiene — regular use of alcohol-based hand rub may be the most convenient option
- maintains physical distancing as much as practicable.

## Meals

A number of steps can be taken to reduce cross contamination risks during meal service. This includes:

- Using plated or boxed meals rather than shared platters, noting that:
  - self-serve buffets, grazing/share plates are not permitted. This requirement extends to organisations providing festive meal services
  - self-serve drinks stations, other than public water bubblers, are not permitted.
- Planning for the number of people that can be in a communal dining place based on physical distancing of a minimum of 1.5 metres between family groups. Consider use of outdoor dining areas, where available, or scheduling functions for different groups on different days/times.



## Cleaning

Facilities should take measures to reduce environmental contamination. They should:

- provide regular reminders for staff, volunteers, performers, residents and family to follow hand hygiene practices throughout the event
- provide hand sanitizers at appropriate locations such as entry and exit points and common areas
- ensure high touch surfaces are wiped down throughout the event
- plan for enhanced cleaning after the event.

## After the event

After the event, staff should monitor for symptoms in residents, staff and volunteers.

## Christmas lights excursions

Residents are able to safely attend facility-organized bus trips to see Christmas lights with a few safety measures:

- ensure the bus driver undergoes the usual COVID-19 screening processes
- maintain physical distancing of 1.5 metres, for example only one person per two-person seat
- provide hand sanitizer for residents, staff (including the bus driver) and volunteers on entry and exit of the bus
- if other persons enter the bus to speak to the residents or residents leave the bus to view the Christmas lights, ensure physical distancing is maintained
- do not allow external groups to enter the bus to sing to the residents
- consider limiting the duration of the trip as people who are in a confined space for two hours or more are considered to be at higher risk for disease transmission.

## When residents return from external events

Under the current aged care direction, residents can leave the facility to attend external events and gatherings. This increases the risk of environmental contamination coming into the facility, but there are effective measures that can be taken. When residents return it is important that:

- they wash their hands or use alcohol-based hand rub before they enter the facility
- staff wipe down walkers and wheelchairs with two in one detergent and disinfectant wipes
- the usual screening of the person escorting the resident back to the facility occurs.

## What will happen to events and activities in aged care if there is a COVID-19 outbreak in Queensland

If there is an outbreak of COVID-19 in Queensland which includes sustained community transmission, further restrictions may be implemented to limit gatherings or events and activities either state-wide, or within identified communities.

Events or activities may be cancelled at short notice.

You can read the latest [Aged Care Direction](#) for the current requirements and restrictions.

