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| Factsheet – visitors to hospitals and care facilities |
| COVID-19 update 11 March 2022 |
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# Who should read this?

This factsheet is to provide guidance for health services and care facilities regarding visitors to hospitals and care facilities.

# What is this factsheet about?

This factsheet provides guidance to hospitals and care facilities about visitor entry, with the aim of:

* providing patients and residents with support from their family and loved ones to minimise isolation and its impacts
* maximising effective communication between clinical teams, patients and their families
* protecting vulnerable patients from potential exposure to COVID-19
* providing measures to optimise safety and minimise infection transmission risk for all patients, staff and visitors.

This factsheet applies to visitation of all patients in Victorian hospitals and care facilities, including patients that have or are being treated for COVID-19. Hospitals and care facilities are committed to balancing the need to facilitate patients’ need for contact with their families and friends with compassion and empathy, and providing services in a safe and effective manner for patients, staff and visitors.

If a care facility is within the grounds of a hospital, the pandemic orders that apply to that care facility are *care facility* orders, not hospital orders: [Pandemic (Visitors to Hospitals and Care Facilities) Order](https://www.health.vic.gov.au/covid-19/hospitals-and-care-facilities-order) <https://www.health.vic.gov.au/covid-19/hospitals-and-care-facilities-order>.

Care facilities include alcohol and drug treatment facilities, homelessness residential services, residential aged care facilities, disability residential service facilities, supported residential service facilities, eligible special disability accommodation, secure welfare service facilities, and the Thomas Embling Hospital.

In addition to the visiting arrangements outlined in this factsheet, hospitals and care facilities may provide equipment (phones, tablets, computers) to assist patients to stay connected with their family as we work towards living with COVID-19 and incorporate the management of the virus in our business-as-usual activity.

# Changes to visiting arrangements

The updates to visiting arrangements strengthen the focus on supporting local-level visitation arrangements based on a comprehensive risk assessment by hospitals and care facilities. Entry requirements are in place for all hospitals and care facilities.

Visitors must be fully vaccinated or show evidence of a negative result from a rapid antigen test taken on the day of the visit, unless authorisation of exemption from entry requirements is granted (outlined in the ‘Exemptions to entry requirements’ section below).

In addition to the directions outlined in the [Pandemic (Visitors to Hospitals and Care Facilities) Order](https://www.health.vic.gov.au/covid-19/hospitals-and-care-facilities-order) <https://www.health.vic.gov.au/covid-19/hospitals-and-care-facilities-order>, hospitals and care facilities may put additional restrictions in place in order to protect vulnerable patients and reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission in their facility.

Hospitals and care facilities should ensure that visiting arrangements are easily accessible through multiple media channels, including on websites and social media. There are documentation requirements that hospitals and care facilities need to maintain that describe visitor details and times of entry and exit for 28 days from the day of entry.

# Changes to hospital visiting

Updated pandemic orders now apply for people visiting **hospitals** during the COVID-19 pandemic:

* Visitors over 18 need to produce a negative rapid antigen test on the day of visitation and wear an N95 mask.
* Visitors under 18 need to produce a negative rapid-antigen test of the day of visitation.
* Visitors under 16 are permitted entry if they are visiting a patient who has a life-threatening medical condition, is receiving palliative care or if they are a child, grandchild or sibling of the patient. They are not counted in the number of visitors if they are visiting a patient having end-of-life treatment or if they are a child, grandchild or sibling of the patient.

Support visits are permitted in emergency departments, outpatient settings, wards and birthing suites.

# Changes to care facility visiting

Updated pandemic orders now apply for people visiting **care facilities** during the COVID-19 pandemic:

* Visitors over 18 need to produce a negative rapid antigen test on the day of visitation.
* Visitors under 18 are required to have a parent or guardian make a declaration that they meet all the criteria for entry.

# What are the principles for care and support visits?

Up to two care and support visits are allowed each day, with no more than two visitors allowed at one time in hospitals.

Care facilities can accept up to 5 visitors a day for residents in their care. No more than 4 visitors can attend a resident at the same time. Visitors may attend the facility each day, but no more than once a day.

Subject to meeting the visitor arrangements, a visitor may attend a hospital or care facility to provide essential care and support necessary for the patient’s immediate emotional or physical wellbeing (including mental health support and support for people living with dementia).

A carer refers to any person including a family member and a person under 18 years of age who provides support, assistance or personal care to a person with healthcare needs or a mental illness, or a disability resulting from a mental illness.

The *Mental Health Act 2014* recognises and supports the active engagement of both consumers and carers in the assessment, treatment and recovery of people with a mental illness. See [Working with consumers and carers](https://www.health.vic.gov.au/mental-health/working-with-consumers-and-carers) <https://www.health.vic.gov.au/mental-health/working-with-consumers-and-carers>.

# What must visitors do?

* The number of visitors is limited to 2 in hospital settings and up to 5 in care facilities. Visitors must stay in the patient/resident’s room and limit movement around the building, apart from quick trips to the bathroom or to purchase food.
* If the patient is suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19, appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) must be used by visitors: see [Infection prevention and control resources](https://www.health.vic.gov.au/covid-19/infection-prevention-control-resources-covid-19) <https://www.health.vic.gov.au/covid-19/infection-prevention-control-resources-covid-19>.
* Health service staff must ensure visitors put on (‘don’) and take off (‘doff’) PPE properly.
* Each hospital or care facility may have different local operating procedures; visitors must also adhere to these directions.

# Do these restrictions apply to hospital workers?

Hospital workers are permitted to remain in hospitals for the purposes of their work. Hospital workers include:

* an employee or contractor of the hospital
* a student of the hospital under the supervision of a worker of the hospital
* a volunteer with specific health service approval to provide goods or services to a patient in hospital
* a person who provides health, medical or pharmaceutical goods or services to a patient of the hospital, whether on a paid or voluntary basis
* a disability worker who is present at the hospital to provide a disability service to a patient
* a person who provides good or services to keep the hospital in operation, whether on a paid or voluntary basis (this includes union and employer representatives)
* a person required for emergency management or law enforcement in the hospital.

# Important – when visiting is not allowed

Individuals **must not visit anyone in a hospital or care facility, even if they are on the allowed to visit list, if they**:

* have been diagnosed with COVID-19 and have not completed 7-day self-isolation
* have had known contact with a person who has COVID-19 in the previous 7 days, are fully vaccinated and have not produced a negative PCR or rapid antigen test
* have had known contact with a person who has COVID-19 in the previous 14 days, are not fully vaccinated and have not produced a negative PCR or rapid antigen test
* have had known contact with a close contact of a person who has COVID-19 and have not produced a negative PCR or rapid antigen test
* have been tested for COVID-19 and have not had the results given to them
* have returned to Australia from overseas in the last 14 days
* do not meet the requirements to gain access to visit a patient or resident
* have a temperature higher than 37.5 degrees or symptoms of acute respiratory infection such as:
  + breathing difficulties such as breathlessness
  + cough
  + sore throat
  + runny nose.

# Exemptions to entry requirements

There are limited circumstances where a person who would be excluded from entering a hospital may be authorised by the hospital (Executive Director of Nursing and Midwifery or equivalent) and/or the Chief Health Officer or Deputy Chief Health Officer to enter the hospital.

A person permitted to enter or remain at a hospital or care facility must comply with any directions or conditions imposed in relation to their visit by the officer who authorised their visit.

The exemptions process may authorise COVID-19 positive people to visit a patient in hospital despite having not completed 7 days of self-quarantine. In exceptional circumstances, this scenario may occur, in which case the operational management of the hospital will make comprehensive risk assessments and formulate a safe way to proceed with the visit. These visits are required to meet COVID-19 infection prevention and control guidelines.

Links below to Minimising the risk of infectious respiratory disease transmission in the context of COVID-19 and COVID-19 Infection prevention and control guidelines:

* Australian Government Department of Health – [Minimising the risk of infectious respiratory disease transmission in the context of COVID-19: the hierarchy of controls](https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/minimising-the-risk-of-infectious-respiratory-disease-transmission-in-the-context-of-covid-19-the-hierarchy-of-controls) <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/minimising-the-risk-of-infectious-respiratory-disease-transmission-in-the-context-of-covid-19-the-hierarchy-of-controls>.
* Victorian Government Department of Health – [Infection prevention control resources - COVID-19](https://www.health.vic.gov.au/covid-19/infection-prevention-control-resources-covid-19) <https://www.health.vic.gov.au/covid-19/infection-prevention-control-resources-covid-19>.

Any exceptions to entry requirements will be determined at a local level based on a comprehensive risk assessment by hospitals and care facilities. Exceptions currently described in the pandemic orders include:

* a person receiving end of life care can have a maximum of two visitors in hospitals and five visitors in care facilities.
* a person who is a parent, carer or guardian of a patient
* a person who is a support person or partner of a pregnant patient of the hospital
* a person who is an immediate family member of a patient whose medical condition is life threatening
* a person providing professional care
* a carer or nominated person where rapid antigen testing prior to entry is not practical
* a person who has a negative PCR result 24 hrs prior to entry to the hospital
* a person that has illnesses or conditions which make vaccination and rapid antigen testing unsuitable
* a person that is not safe in all circumstances to have vaccination and or rapid-antigen testing (hospital settings only).

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