

# Keeping residential aged care residents safe this festive season

# 2025



As we enter the festive season, it is important for residential aged care home (RACH) residents to spend time with family and loved ones.

During this period, aged care providers should be mindful of the risk of gastroenteritis (such as norovirus), respiratory viruses (particularly COVID-19), mosquito-borne viruses, and foodborne pathogens, as well as the health impacts of warm weather.

RACHs should plan ahead to ensure they have a safe and enjoyable festive period. This includes confirming general practitioners (GP) coverage arrangements over the holiday period and ensuring staff working during this time are aware of the arrangements. Being prepared means residents and staff can enjoy this time, while remaining safe.

## Seasonal health risks

### Staying safe from heat and warm weather

Residents need to stay cool and hydrated during warm weather. Ensure air-conditioners, fans, refrigerators, freezers, and medication and vaccine storage systems are working properly.

When temperatures rise, and especially when residents go home with family or on outings, encourage them to:

- Stay indoors during the hottest part of the day
- Wear light, loose-fitting clothing to stay comfortable
- If going outdoors, use sunscreen, wear sun-protective clothing, and spend time in cool, shaded areas

- Ensure residents always have water available and drink plenty of water regularly (unless on fluid restriction; follow medical advice).

### Preventing mosquito bites

Mosquitoes are more common in summer across NSW, and some can transmit diseases.

RACH residents and staff should be encouraged to:

- Cover up outdoors: Wear loose, light-coloured clothing with long sleeves, long pants, covered footwear, and socks.
- Use mosquito repellent: Effective repellents contain picaridin (icaridin), DEET, or Oil of Lemon Eucalyptus (OLE). Apply sunscreen first, then repellent.
- Plan around mosquito activity: Mosquitoes are most active at dawn, dusk, and into the evening. Use extra protection during these times and avoid hosting near mosquito-prone areas (e.g. water bodies).
- Get vaccinated: People who live or work in eligible areas may qualify for a free Japanese Encephalitis Virus (JEV) vaccine. Visit the [NSW Health JEV Vaccination webpage](#) for details.
- Maintain mosquito control around the facility:
  - Use insecticide sprays or vapour dispensers where appropriate.
  - Remove stagnant water from containers, drains, and gutters.
  - Consider installing fly screens, self-closing doors or floor sweeps.

## Acute respiratory illnesses

Stay up to date with the latest [advice to residential aged care homes \(RACHs\)](#) and recommended vaccinations, including COVID-19.

- People aged 75 years and older are recommended to have a COVID-19 vaccine every 6 months.
- People aged 65 – 74 years are recommended to have a COVID-19 vaccine every 12 months but can receive one every 6 months.

RACHs can seek support from local GPs and community pharmacists to help administer vaccinations to residents.

Complete a [Pre-assessment action plan for respiratory infections in aged care facility residents](#) to support timely access to antiviral medicines, especially when GPs may be less available during public holidays. Continue following the [Guidance for residential aged care facilities on the public health management of acute respiratory infections](#), for residents and staff who test positive for an acute respiratory infection (ARI) or are exposed during the holiday season.

## Gastroenteritis

Good hand hygiene is the best way to reduce the risk of spreading gastroenteritis. Ensure residents, staff and visitors have access to hand hygiene facilities.

RACHs should have appropriate preparedness plans in place to ensure a timely response to gastroenteritis outbreaks. Refer to the [Gastro Pack for Hospital and Aged Care Facilities](#).

## Event and food safety

### Holding an event

When hosting events with performers (e.g. choirs, musicians, carol singers), RACHs should ensure:

- They communicate entry requirements to performers in advance.
- Performers should not enter the RACH if they have cold or flu symptoms or if they tested positive for COVID-19 in the past 7 days.
- Events are held in large, well-ventilated spaces.

### Food safety

Hot weather increases the risk of foodborne illness. The [Guidelines for Food Service to Vulnerable Persons](#) provide advice on managing food safety risks. Those preparing meals should be aware of [high-risk foods](#) for people over 65.

RACHs can support safe food practices by sharing these key tips with families:

- Keep it cold: Refrigerate perishable foods immediately. Discard any food left out for more than 4 hours.
- Keep it clean: Practice good hand hygiene—wash and dry hands thoroughly before preparing food. Avoid touching shared food by offering individual portions or using separate serving utensils.
- Keep it hot: Maintain hot foods at a safe temperature of at least 60°C until served.

## People and movement

### Visitors and staff

Visits can continue even if there are cases of acute respiratory infections (ARIs) in the RACH. All visitors should follow the facility's entry requirements and mask guidance.

RACHs should assess local risks to determine appropriate measures for safe visitation. Visitors and staff should not enter if they have cold or flu symptoms or have tested positive for COVID-19 in the past 7 days.

### Individual and group outings

It's important that residents have opportunities to attend family gatherings and group activities during the holiday period. Outings can still take place even if there are cases of ARIs in the RACH.

However, residents who are unwell should stay at the facility, get tested for respiratory infections, and wait until they feel better before going out.

Before an outing:

- Residents may choose to wear a mask to help protect themselves.
- Encourage COVID-safe behaviours, such as good hand hygiene.
- Family and friends with cold or flu symptoms should avoid attending gatherings with residents. In exceptional cases, people with symptoms may attend if they:
  - Take a COVID-19 rapid antigen test (RAT) beforehand
  - Wear a mask
  - Meet outdoors where possible.

Residents should be tested for respiratory infections if they develop symptoms after returning to the RACH.

Facilities can contact their local [Public Health Unit \(1300 066 055\)](#) if they have any concerns with the above advice.

# Festive season safety checklist for RACHs

## Infection prevention and control

- Monitor residents for signs of respiratory or gastroenteritis illnesses.
- Ensure residents are up to date with vaccinations and have an updated [Pre-assessment action plan](#).
- Ensure hand hygiene stations are stocked and accessible.
- Have outbreak preparedness plans for ARIs and gastroenteritis.
- Consider masks and entry requirements based on internal risk assessments.
- Confirming GP coverage arrangements over the holiday period.

## Visitors and staff

- Remind staff and visitors not to attend if unwell.
- Revisit infection control training for staff.
- Communicate entry requirements to visitors.
  - Provide clear signage for visitor check-in and health screening.

## Food safety and events

- Follow safe food handling and storage practices.
  - Avoid leaving food out during events or in resident rooms.
  - Check use-by dates and refrigeration temperatures.
  - Promote regular hand hygiene.
- Confirm event plans with infection control staff.
- Limit crowding and ensure good ventilation.

## Warm weather safety

- Check daily weather forecasts and plan activities accordingly.
- Check and maintain air-conditioners, fans, fridges, freezers, and medication storage.
- Ensure residents are hydrated—offer water regularly.
- Adjust clothing and bedding for warmer conditions.
- Monitor for signs of heat stress, especially in higher risk residents.

## Mosquito bite prevention

- Apply insect repellent as needed, especially during outings.
- Encourage protective clothing and correct use of repellent.
- Maintain mosquito control:
  - Use insecticide sprays or vapour dispensers where appropriate.
  - Remove standing water from outdoor areas where possible.
  - Consider installing fly screens, self closing doors or floor sweeps.
- Avoid hosting events near mosquito-prone areas.

## Outings

- Conduct risk assessments for all planned outings.
- Ensure residents have sun protection (hats, sunscreen).
- Carry water and first aid supplies.

We wish you a  
safe and enjoyable  
festive period

