



**Vacenti Update on Coronavirus - COVID-19 - Update no 4**  
**Information Known as of 18<sup>th</sup> March, 2020**

Firstly, it is important that you read this in its entirety and please pass it along to other friends and relatives who may visit our homes.

Vacenti would like to sincerely thank all residents, families and friends for your cooperation and understanding at this unprecedented time. We know there is a lot of concern in the community and the rate of change in both the situation, and information provided by a multitude of sources is staggering. However, we can assure that all of our staff are working very hard, every day, to keep you and your loved ones as safe as possible. The purpose of this advice is as follows:-

- 1 to provide you with the measures to be introduced by the Aged Care industry announced by the Prime Minister this morning,
- 2 to explain what actions Vacenti is taking to keep our residents as safe as possible, and
- 3 to detail the assistance we require from visitors, including families and friends.

**Measures Announced by the Prime Minister 18<sup>th</sup> March 2020**

The following measures were announced by the Prime Minister and further details confirmed by the Department of Health today. The full Fact Sheet is below. In summary the following applies as of tomorrow for all Vacenti Homes:

- a) Visitors who have returned from overseas or been in contact with someone confirmed to have COVID-19 in the last 14 days will not be able to visit a residential aged care facility. Anyone with a fever, or symptoms of a respiratory illness must not visit.
- b) From 1 May, you must have your influenza vaccination in order to visit an aged care facility.
- c) Visits should be short, and conducted in the resident's room, outside, or in a specific designated area (not a communal space).
- d) Each resident may have no more than two visitors, including doctors, at a time, and visits by children 16 years and under are not permitted except in special circumstances.
- e) All visitors will need to wash their hands before entering and leaving a resident's room and will be encouraged to practise social distancing where possible, including to stay away when unwell.
- f) Large group visits, gatherings, and external excursions will be postponed. Residents will be supported to stay connected with family and friends by phone and video calls.

We know there will be many questions about the mandatory requirement for influenza vaccinations (b above). We expect that we will be provided further detailed information about this requirement, whether evidence is required, and to the position with families and visitors who choose not to be vaccinated. We will keep you informed as information comes available and well before the 1<sup>st</sup> May.

Unfortunately, the Department of Health has not specified what is considered a "short visit". We request family members use common sense when deciding on the duration of their visits. For those family members who stay with their loved one for very extended periods, sometimes each and every day, please discuss your circumstances with your Facility Manager. Should further information become available we will certainly pass it along.

With respect to where visits are to be conducted, Vacenti's preference is for visits to be kept to "in room" or in many of our external balconies and garden areas. Where this is not possible, site specific areas will be set aside and advised.

With the increased restrictions on visits from families and friends, Vacenti is aware of the increased risk of social isolation to your loved one. To ensure this risk is minimised we advise you utilise the following communication channels in place:

- Vacenti has invested in a limited number of mobile communication stations utilising Skype to allow video calls between you and your loved one. We envisage this will be set up early next week at each home and we will advise full details in the coming days.
- Feel free to phone in. If your loved one does not have a phone extension we can provide a mobile one, or transfer your call to them.
- Make use of our “Contact a Resident” through our website [vacenti.com.au](http://vacenti.com.au). Through this you can provide messages and photos. We will print them out and ensure they get to your loved one.

### **What Vacenti is doing to manage COVID-19**

As you can imagine we have teams of our best people in each and every home, and in Shared Services, looking at our response measures daily, including the advice received and how we will respond.

What we are doing / have done is:

- Take our ongoing advice from the Commonwealth Department of Health and Chief Medical Officer,
- Establish a core group of senior managers who monitor the situation and advice given every day,
- Establish a Coronavirus committee that meets at least weekly to ensure fluent coordination, education and communication,
- Provide additional training to key staff on every site on COVID-19 and infection control,
- Provide additional on-the-floor support from Workforce Development nurses,
- Undertake significant additional cleaning and sanitising of high-contact points,
- Review all stocks necessary should we get a case of COVID-19,
- Place the same requirements on service contractors visiting our homes,
- Place stringent restrictions on our staff who report ill or returning from holidays overseas,

plus a lot lot more. We are doing everything we can to protect the safety of your loved one. Feel free to discuss this with our Facility Manager.

As advised previously, Vacenti will take a very precautionary approach to any resident, family or visitor showing any signs of a chest infection, cold or flu. This will include isolation of residents and use of protective precautions until test results are returned. We hope you can appreciate this precautionary approach. If you visit a site and see staff wearing PPE, or a resident in isolation, this does not necessarily mean we have a case of Coronavirus. As the Department of Health have stated:

*While coronavirus is of concern, it is important to remember that most people displaying symptoms such as fever, cough, sore throat or tiredness are likely suffering with a cold or other respiratory illness—not coronavirus.*

Vacenti has always been honest and open in our outbreak communications. We will tell you if we have a confirmed case of coronavirus.

We are aware a number of larger providers have completely closed their sites to all visitors. Vacenti has decided to follow Department of Health recommendations which does not include complete isolation. We are very confident that all family, visitors and staff completely understand risk this virus brings to the aged and will do everything absolutely possible not to introduce COVID-19 into our homes.

### **What we need from you to assist us in keeping resident safe**

Our priority is to prevent the virus from entering our homes. We re-enforce our request for families not to visit any of our homes if:

- they are suffering cold/flu type symptoms. According to the Department of Health, symptoms include (but are not limited to) fever, cough, sore throat, fatigue and shortness of breath.
- they, or someone they have been in contact with, has visited any area where the COVID-19 virus has spread, for a period of 14 days after that visit/contact.
- they had returned from overseas in the last 14 days.

We require assistance in preventing possible spread through:

- washing hands often with soap and water before and after entering your loved one's room and frequently whilst on site. Including after attending the toilet;
- avoiding contact with others by keeping family members at home if they are unwell;
- cough and sneeze into the tissues available or into their elbow.

Please do not be offended if our staff point out hand sanitiser or hand washing stations.

The annual vaccination of residents against Influenza A and B is a critical safeguard against possibly co-morbidities. We would appreciate your proactively contacting your relevant home to confirm your loved one's participation in a flu vaccination program.

**It is very important that all visitors sign-in and out each visit using the register located at reception.** Should a case of COVID-19 occur in one of our home, trace contact is important for the health authorities. Should visitors fail to comply with this direction alternative entries into our homes will be restricted.

We will apologise now, in advance, if we find it necessary to not provide the same level of fine dining and fine living experience in the short term whilst staff spend additional time on cleaning, providing emotional support and infection control. It is only some of the little "niceties" which may be suspended, the same quality care and safety will be provided.

The Regulatory Authorities require us to consider, and plan for a "worst case" scenario and Vacenti would be negligent if we didn't anyway. It is time for a difficult conversation. If the community, in general, does not get COVID-19 under control and the number of cases in the community dramatically increases then, most probably, any infected residents will be cared for in our homes. The hospital network is advising that access to hospital beds may become limited. In a "worst case" scenario where we have a number of residents affected, then it will be safer and necessary for all concerned if we group those residents together in one area. This may require temporary room changes. Obviously there will be many more communications to you before, and should, we get to that stage. It is also important that we have recorded any final wishes through an Advanced Health Directive or Statement of Choices. Where we don't have one on file, our staff may contact the EPOA or assigned health representative to discuss. However, let us state again that our collective number one objective is not to allow the virus onto our sites and seek your absolute cooperation to assist us in achieving that.

We have quite a number of family contacts for whom we do not have an email address and are missing out in this information and will continue to miss out. If you have been forwarded this message by family or friend and not received the original then we do not have you on file. Feel free to send you details to the undersigned, which must include the home and resident's name to align it to.

Vacenti can assure you that the health and safety of residents, families, visitors and staff is of utmost importance. If you have any concerns about the COVID-19 virus, or any other matter, please contact your Facility Manager.



## Information for residents of residential aged care services, their family members and visitors

Older people are more at risk of both contracting COVID-19, and having a serious illness as a result. Managers, staff, family, friends and residents need to work together to protect our most vulnerable community members.

In order to protect older people, new restrictions on visits to aged care facilities apply. It is important staff, visitors and visiting workers take care to ensure they stay away from residential aged care services if they may have COVID-19. They should closely monitor their own health, and will be asked to provide details on their health status before entering a facility.

### Residents

Like all members of the community, people who live in residential aged care services have an important role to play in protecting their own health. In addition to practising good hygiene and social distancing, there will be restrictions on visits to residential aged care facilities. Large group visits, gatherings, and external excursions will be postponed. Residents will be supported to stay connected with family and friends by phone and video calls.

If you develop symptoms of COVID-19, you will be kept separate from other residents and will not be able to see visitors. Health care and residential care workers will continue to provide support and care while you are isolated. If you need to leave your room, such as for medical care, you will be required to wear a surgical mask, which will be provided by health care workers. There is no need for any healthy resident to wear a mask.

### Visitors

Visitors who have returned from overseas or been in contact with someone confirmed to have COVID-19 in the last 14 days will not be able to visit a residential aged care facility. Nor will anyone with a fever, symptoms of a respiratory illness, or who has not been vaccinated against influenza, be able to visit.

From 1 May, you must have your influenza vaccination in order to visit an aged care facility.

Visits should be short, and conducted in the resident's room, outside, or in a specific designated area (not a communal space).

Each resident may have no more than two visitors, including doctors, at a time, and visits by children 16 years and under are not permitted except in special circumstances.

All visitors will need to wash their hands before entering and leaving a resident's room and will be encouraged to practise social distancing where possible, including to stay away when unwell.

### Managers and staff

The Government has announced that residential aged care facilities should take extra precautions to keep residents safe from COVID-19. The health of staff will be closely monitored, new and returning residents will be screened before entry, and signage and other forms of communication will be used to explain the steps being taken to protect the health of residents.

To make more workers available to aged care providers, the Government is relaxing international student visa work conditions for aged care facilities and home care providers. This will allow international student nurses and other aged care workers to work more than the 40 hours a fortnight. There are currently around 20,000 international student nurses studying in Australia.

## How can we help prevent the spread of coronavirus?

Practising good hand and sneeze/cough hygiene is the best defence against most viruses. You should:

- wash your hands frequently with soap and water, including before and after eating, and after going to the toilet
- cover your cough and sneeze, dispose of tissues, and wash your hands, and
- avoid contact with others (stay more than 1.5 metres from people whenever possible).

## More information

While coronavirus is of concern, it is important to remember that most people displaying symptoms such as fever, cough, sore throat or tiredness are likely suffering with a cold or other respiratory illness – not COVID-19.

For the latest advice, information and resources, go to [www.health.gov.au](http://www.health.gov.au)

Call the National Coronavirus Help Line on 1800 020 080. It operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week. If you require translating or interpreting services, call 131 450.

The phone number of each state or territory public health agency is available at [www.health.gov.au/state-territory-contacts](http://www.health.gov.au/state-territory-contacts)

If you have concerns about your health, speak to a doctor.

Yours sincerely

**Brian Sharp**

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**Vacenti** 

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