



COVID-19

Guidance for testing and isolation in aged residential care (ARC) facilities

13 July 2022

This guidance has been developed based on the COVID-19 Testing Plan and Testing guidance, which can be found on the Ministry of Health website: <https://www.health.govt.nz/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-response-planning/covid-19-testing-plan-and-testing-guidance>

Staff in ARC facilities

Daily surveillance testing of asymptomatic staff is recommended during a surge in COVID positive community/facility cases.

Symptomatic staff

- Stay home if unwell
- Conduct a RAT – If positive standard public health isolation is 7 days from onset of symptoms. However, there is specific guidance for management of health care workers who are cases; see further below.
- If RAT negative, two additional tests each at least 24 hours apart (3 over 48 hours) are recommended. If these are all negative, stay at home until 24 hours after acute symptoms have resolved.

Return to work for staff who are household contacts or cases

Healthcare Workers' (HCW) Guidance has been developed for the management of critical healthcare workers, delivering critical health services, who are COVID-19 cases and household contacts during an Omicron outbreak. This guidance enables return to work prior to completion of self-isolation requirements where risk assessment suggests this is appropriate and with specific conditions in place.

This guidance can be used where the service provision is at risk of substantial compromise, due to staff absence, related to infection or exposure during the COVID-19 response. There is also specific advice for staff who are not critical for service delivery at the time of their COVID-19 illness:

<https://www.health.govt.nz/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-information-health-professionals/guidance-critical-health-services-during-omicron-outbreak#supporting>

Staff who become **a household contact but remain asymptomatic** can perform a daily RAT and if that is negative, come to work if they are needed to maintain safe service delivery as per the HCW Guidance.

This is an exemption to enable a person to work (using all other IPC precautions in place – mask use, hand hygiene, distancing) but they are required to return to isolation at home when not at work. They also need to do a Day 3 and Day 7 RAT, as required for everyone who is a household contact, if they are not otherwise doing a RAT because they are working on those days.

RESIDENTS IN ARC FACILITIES

Preventing and managing facility transmission between residents

Residents in ARC facilities are a vulnerable population group, who may require some additional measures to help support both clinical and public health management.

Decisions about resident isolation need to balance resident wellbeing with transmission risk. Different parts of a facility can be managed with different isolation requirements and release dates.

For the purposes of risk assessment, residents can be defined as household contacts of each other if they share facilities such as dining, living and activity rooms, and/or bathrooms.

ARC Residents who are cases

Symptomatic residents should be RAT tested immediately. If a negative RAT result (but remains symptomatic), a PCR test is recommended. A prompt diagnosis of COVID-19 is important for those that are eligible for and may benefit from administration of oral antivirals.

In consultation with your clinical lead, it may be appropriate at times to also test for other respiratory pathogens (such as influenza) over winter. Contact your regional Health of Older People team and public health unit around local testing for other respiratory illnesses.

Consideration should also be given to confirming a positive RAT with a PCR test, for the first few cases in a facility to confirm presence of outbreak.

Covid-19 positive residents (cases) need to be isolated from the community for at least 7 days from onset of symptoms or a positive test result if asymptomatic. This means residents are required to isolate in the facility, but not necessarily in their room.

How this is managed within a facility will vary depending on the circumstances. In some instances, cohorting positive cases and allowing them contact with each other may be preferred. Reverse isolating is another option, if there are only a small number of non-infected residents.

Some residents may continue to have some symptoms beyond day 7 - it is recommended they stay isolated until 24 hours after acute symptoms resolve, but not longer than 10 days unless significantly immunocompromised.

After 7 to 10 days, infectivity risk from people who are cases, who are symptomatically recovered, is substantially reduced. A risk assessment to inform easing of restrictions and release decisions within a facility can include severity of illness of the person themselves, as well as impacts on other residents.

After 7 days isolation, residents do not require testing to be released. Medical advice should be sought regarding release for residents who have had a severe illness or are severely immunocompromised.

Key points

- Residents who have been COVID-19 positive are exempt from isolating as a COVID-19 contact for 90 days.
- Residents who have been COVID positive and are now asymptomatic do not require any further RAT testing for 90 days after the period of isolation has been completed unless new symptoms develop.
- If symptoms develop after 28 days, they should be RAT tested. If the RAT is positive, see reinfection guidance at the link below.
- Other illnesses such as influenza are also circulating at this time. If RAT negative, it is important to isolate any residents with new onset of symptoms that are not due to a chronic illness if influenza is suspected. Testing for other respiratory pathogens may be appropriate. Contact your regional Health of Older People team and public health unit around local testing for other respiratory illnesses.

Reinfection

For information on reinfection please refer to the updated guidance on the Ministry website:

<https://www.health.govt.nz/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-health-advice-public/advice-people-covid-19/getting-reinfected-covid-19>

Residents who have interacted with COVID-19 positive people

RAT testing asymptomatic residents who have interacted with COVID-19 positive people should be based on risk assessment, in particular the level of interaction should be taken into account (whether they are deemed household contacts or not). The purpose of testing in this situation is to find cases and reduce transmission between residents.

In consultation with a healthcare practitioner, consideration can be given to the most appropriate isolation timeframe for exposed residents. This should be based on risk assessments and possible exposures, for the purpose of reducing transmission between residents.

- Residents who have had close or direct interaction with a staff member, resident or visitor who is in their infectious period may be considered as an ARC exposure. As part of preventing and / or managing a potential facility outbreak, it is important to undertake a risk-assessment.

This may include vaccination status, underlying health conditions (such as the immunocompromised), correct use of masks by staff and visitors indoors and the presence of symptoms in the positive staff members, residents or visitors.

- For those with less and short-lived contact, exposed residents do not require isolation. Continue to monitor exposed residents for symptoms for 7 days from the time of exposure and RAT test immediately if symptoms develop.
- When there is ongoing transmission in the facility, asymptomatic residents can be RAT tested every 48 hours, until 7 days after the last case or as directed by local public health unit.

Visitors

Symptomatic visitors and those who are identified as community household contacts are not permitted entry.

Vaccination status should no longer impact ability to visit residents in ARC. This means any asymptomatic visitors including children should be able to visit ARC residents.

RAT testing is not recommended before entry; if requested by the facility but testing is refused, alternative visiting arrangements should be negotiated. Visitors within the facility should follow standard public health advice:

- Wear a mask
- Practice good hand hygiene
- Keep distanced from others who are not the person being visited.

Note: Visitors who have recently been a case or household contact should avoid visiting a facility for a 10 day period from onset of symptoms in the case (or date of positive test if asymptomatic). (The exception may be for visits to palliative residents with the appropriate public health precautions mentioned above).

Compassionate visiting for palliative residents is at the discretion of the facility, including equity considerations; it is important that wellbeing of families and residents is taken into consideration.

See testing guidance for staff, residents, newly arriving or returning residents, and visitors (including contractors) in the table in the Appendix below

APPENDIX

Testing guidance table

Staff	Symptomatic	Stay home if unwell. Conduct a RAT immediately. If RAT positive, refer to Healthcare Workers guidance (HCW) for return to work management. If RAT negative, two additional tests each at least 24 hours apart are recommended (3 over 48 hours). If these are all negative, stay at home until 24 hours after acute symptoms have resolved.
	Asymptomatic Household Contact	Refer to Healthcare Worker Guidance – if critical worker, daily RAT to work to maintain safe service delivery, or remain at home in isolation. In either case, RAT on days 3 and 7 of isolation of the initial case in the household.
	Asymptomatic	No test
Residents	Symptomatic	Conduct RAT. If RAT negative, but remains symptomatic, PCR test to confirm. Consider testing for other respiratory pathogens to support clinical and public health management. Contact your regional Health of Older People team and public health unit around local testing for other respiratory illnesses. If RAT positive, consider confirming a positive RAT with PCR test, for the first few cases in facility to confirm presence of outbreak.
	Asymptomatic	No test OR If there is an exposure or ongoing transmission within the facility, option to RAT every 48 hours (for the purpose of finding cases).
Newly arriving or returning Residents	Symptomatic	Conduct RAT. If negative, but remains symptomatic, PCR test to confirm. Consider testing for other respiratory pathogens to support clinical and public health management. If RAT positive, consider confirming with PCR test, as for all resident cases.
	Asymptomatic Household Contact	Isolate and test as per community advice for household contacts
	Asymptomatic	RAT on arrival (need for this should be based on risk assessment)
Visitors (including contractors)	Symptomatic	No Entry (compassionate only)
	Asymptomatic Household Contact	No Entry (compassionate only)
	Asymptomatic	No test

ADDITIONAL USEFUL INFORMATION:

Guidance on PPE in Community settings can be found: <https://www.health.govt.nz/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-information-specific-audiences/covid-19-personal-protective-equipment-central-supply/covid-19-infection-prevention-and-control-recommendations-health-and-disability-care-workers#ppeinfo>