

17 March 2020

CORONAVIRUS UPDATE #3 FOR ALL UNITING AGEWELL RESIDENTS, FAMILIES AND VISITORS

I am writing to seek your help in protecting those older people who are being cared for in our aged care residences and across our community services and programs.

Older people are at risk of contracting coronavirus (known as COVID-19) and having a serious illness as a result.

As you will be well aware, COVID-19 is now a global pandemic. The situation in Australia is unprecedented and changing on a daily basis. Uniting AgeWell is monitoring and following the actions and advice of Government and the federal and state Departments of Health in order to reduce the risk of spread of infection in our communities.

COVID-19 is spread through close contact with someone who has the virus, contact with droplets from an infected person's cough or sneeze, and touching surfaces that have droplets from an infected person such as a door handle. Symptoms from COVID-19 may include any of: a runny nose, fever, cough or shortness of breath.

Social distancing and good hygiene practice is the key to containing the spread of this virus.

Visitor restrictions

As part of Uniting AgeWell's plan to reduce and contain any risk of COVID-19, we have made the difficult decision to implement visitor access restrictions to our aged care residences and services. This is essential if we are to successfully protect those in our care and our staff from the risk of infection.

Effective from 8pm, Tuesday 17 March, visitors will not be permitted to enter Uniting AgeWell aged care residences for at least 14 days.

We understand the emotional burden these restrictions will have on families and residents and seek your understanding and support as we all navigate through this unprecedented situation.

Our decision to restrict visitors has not been made lightly and you will no doubt appreciate it has been made in the very best interests of our residents.

Exemptions to the 14 day exclusion will only be granted in exceptional circumstances.

If seeking an exemption, we ask that you contact the Residential Services Manager at the site via telephone ahead of any requested visit.

We will continue to review the visitor restriction period in line with Government and medical advice and will keep you informed of any changes.

What other measures Uniting AgeWell has in place to reduce and manage the risk of COVID-19

Uniting AgeWell has created a COVID-19 taskforce comprising senior executives and managers. This taskforce is chaired by myself and is meeting every 48 hours to ensure we are well prepared and resourced and our Pandemic plan is implemented to reduce and contain any risk of COVID-19 across our services.

Uniting AgeWell has in place robust infection management and control policies and practices, which are being closely monitored and reinforced. We are:

- Monitoring staff for respiratory and other illness;
- Managing staff returning to work from holidays overseas or members of their household or close contact who may have returned from overseas; or is suspected of having or is confirmed as having COVID-19, noting they are required to quarantine for a period of 14 days in all of these circumstances;
- Closely monitoring residents for signs and symptoms of COVID-19;
- Reviewing and activating our infection control plan;
- Undertaking refresher training for staff and actively monitoring good hand hygiene and cough etiquette among our staff, residents and visitors; and
- Communicating regularly with staff, residents, families, visitors and contractors.

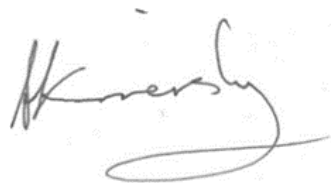
Staff are well informed on how to manage a resident who is unwell with a respiratory illness.

If any residents are diagnosed with COVID-19, they will need to be isolated. Health care and residential care workers will continue to provide support and care while the resident is isolated.

I cannot emphasise enough the importance of everyone working together in order to reduce and minimise the spread of infection to protect our residents, staff and each other.

Please be assured that Uniting AgeWell is doing everything it possibly can to reduce the risk and keep people safe. Thank you for your understanding and cooperation during these challenging times.

Yours sincerely



Andrew Kinnersly
Chief Executive Officer
Uniting AgeWell

Information resources:

Further information about how you can protect yourself and your family from COVID-19 is available by visiting the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services website www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus.

The Commonwealth Department of Health also have information for residential aged care residents, families and visitors that can be found here: <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-information-for-residents-of-residential-care-services-family-members-and-visitors>