

## Update to the Industry Code for Visiting Residential Aged Care Homes during COVID-19

As Australia moves towards ‘COVID normal’, aged care providers are being required to walk the vanishingly fine line between the need to increase availability and access to aged care residents against the need to manage the ongoing infection risk.

On 20 November 2020, the *Industry Code for Visiting Residential Aged Care Homes During Covid-19* (the **Industry Code**) was updated to recognise the different levels of risk faced by providers and residents across Australia. The revised Code now includes a tiered approach to how aged care providers should respond to the pandemic.

Under the previous version of the Industry Code, Principle 13 stated that providers were entitled to vary their own response to COVID-19 as risks changed within the community. The revised Code now provides specific guidance on how a provider should vary their response through the introduction of the ‘Tiered Escalation’ model.

### Tiered Escalation Model

Under the revised Code, Principle 15 provides that providers may vary their response in accordance with these Escalation Tiers. The Tiered Escalation model allows aged care facilities to escalate or de-escalate their response depending on the specific COVID-19 risk in their local area. Importantly, the Code provides that no residential aged care facility should remain a higher Escalation Tier any longer than necessary.

The following table outlines the different tiers:

	COVID-19 Situation	Restrictions
<b>Tier 1</b>	No transmission or local community transmission; only cases are those who have returned from overseas	Few restrictions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No entry if unwell or COVID-19 related symptoms or if they have recently travelled from overseas or a designated hotspot town/suburbs.</li> </ul>
<b>Tier 2</b>	Facility located in a defined hotspot. This includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Localised outbreaks with cases occurring in households or nearby venues; or</li> <li>A single case in a setting with high transmission risk. This includes a residential aged care facility; or</li> <li>A flag such as an upstream source not able to be identified.</li> </ul>	Moderate restrictions dependent on the situation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mask use;</li> <li>Visitation restrictions;</li> <li>Testing; and</li> <li>Single site worker arrangements.</li> </ul>
<b>Tier 3</b>	COVID-19 outbreak in the community	Increased restrictions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Compulsory mask wearing;</li> <li>Visitation restrictions;</li> <li>Encourage working from home where appropriate;</li> <li>Avoid non-essential travel; and</li> <li>Testing.</li> </ul>

## Tiers in practice

The updated Industry Code has included some examples to illustrate how the Escalation Tiers should be applied.

### **Example 1: No community transmission**

Where there is no community transmission providers should follow Tier 1 requirements.

WA is currently in a Tier 1 situation, and so visitation procedures should reflect pre-COVID arrangements. Visitors will remain subject to screening procedures in accordance with the *Visitors to Residential Aged Care Facilities Directions (No. 4)*.

### **Example 2: Localised outbreaks small, prolonged community transmission**

With the transition from WA's hard border stance to a controlled interstate border, the risk of a localised outbreak has increased. Providers must be vigilant and should fluctuate between Tiers as necessary. Facilities closer to the epicentre of the outbreak are likely to enter Tier 3, while bordering suburbs should be Tier 2 and those further away Tier 1.

### **Example 3: Significant community transmission**

Where there is significant community transmission providers will enter Tier 3. Where a government directive restricts all visitors, this will be considered Tier 3 until otherwise directed.

## Industry Code Principles

The applicable Principles recommend different actions dependent on what Escalation Tier the provider is operating under. The Principles are summarised in the following table:

<b>Principle 1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All Tiers will continue to facilitate visits between residents and visitors, including Community Visitor Scheme participants.</li> <li>All volunteer types should be permitted in Tier 1 and 2. However, during Tier 3, the facility has discretion whether or not to permit general volunteers' entry.</li> </ul>
<b>Principle 2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>During Tier 1, visitations continue as occurred pre-COVID with the additional requirements of visitor screening.</li> <li>During Tier 2 or 3, visits may occur in a variety of ways and may be supplemented by additional ways to connect (telephone, videoconference or window contact).</li> </ul>
<b>Principle 3</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>During Tier 2 or 3 residential aged care facilities may be required to limit the overall number of people permitted on the premises.</li> <li>Where there is an outbreak, the facility may temporarily increase restrictions including reverting to additional ways to connect only or temporarily excluding all visitors.</li> </ul>
<b>Principle 4</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All Tiers must place the wishes and preferences of residents at the centre of decision making in relation to who visits them.</li> <li>These choices will be respected unless the visitor is prohibited under government directives.</li> </ul>
<b>Principle 5</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>During all Tiers, existing legislation and regulations continue to apply including the <i>Aged Care Act 1977</i> and its related Principles.</li> <li>The Industry Code acknowledges that any government directives will take precedence over the Industry Code.</li> </ul>

<b>Principle 6</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ During <i>all</i> Tiers, the following visitors will be denied entry:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ unwell individuals;</li> <li>▪ Those with a temperature greater than 37.5° (38° if within South Australia);</li> <li>▪ those with a history of fever (e.g. chills, night sweats);</li> <li>▪ those with a cough, sore throat, runny nose, shortness of breath or displaying any cold/flu, respiratory or COVID-19 related symptoms; or</li> <li>▪ those who have recently travelled from a hotspot or overseas.</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ At minimum, the entry requirements include:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ answering screening questions honestly;</li> <li>▪ demonstrating up to date flu vaccinations; and</li> <li>▪ complying with visitor requirements including hand hygiene, social distancing and use of PPE as directed.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Principle 7</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ During Tier 2 or 3, the following circumstances require additional consideration while maintaining visits:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ residents who are dying should be allowed in-room visits from loved ones on a regular basis, with arrangements reflecting what is needed for the person to die with dignity and comfort;</li> <li>▪ residents who have a clearly established and regular pattern of involvement from visitors must continue to have these visits facilitated; and</li> <li>▪ residents who have clear mental health issues should maintain social and family connection to relieve social and emotion distress.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Principle 8</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ During Tier 2, consideration should be given for more flexible approaches for visits by persons who travel extensive distances to visit the resident.</li> <li>▪ A prior agreement between the visitor and the provider will be required to determine if an extended-duration visit is able to be accommodated.</li> </ul>
<b>Principle 9</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ All Tiers may subject visitors to booking systems and screening procedures.</li> <li>▪ The length of visits may be restricted during Tier 2 or 3.</li> </ul>
<b>Principle 10</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ All Tiers will continue to receive letters, parcels including gifts, non-perishable food and communication devices to the facility.</li> <li>▪ Tier 2 or 3 may subject parcels to appropriate additional infection prevention measures.</li> </ul>
<b>Principle 11</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Where there are increased visitor restrictions, regular and responsive communication between families and the home will increase.</li> <li>▪ Providers should openly and transparently communicate the needs of each Tier and the period of de-escalation.</li> </ul>
<b>Principle 12</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ During Tier 1 or 2, residents can continue to use public spaces within the home including outdoor spaces.</li> </ul>
<b>Principle 13</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ All Tiers will maintain access to medical and related services.</li> <li>▪ Where a resident leaves the facility (e.g. to hospital), they will be subject to screening procedures. Self-isolation and quarantine on return from hospital will not be required in Tier 1 or 2. Self-isolation or quarantine should only occur during Tier 3 if directed by a public health unit or medical practitioner.</li> </ul>
<b>Principle 14</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ During Tier 1 or 2, external outings and visits are permitted provided they can be conducted in a safe manner.</li> <li>▪ External outings or visits are not permitted during Tier 3.</li> </ul>

To view the entire Code see [here](#).

### Visitation Restrictions by Tier

The following table outlines the actions providers should take in escalating or de-escalating visitor restrictions between Tiers as directed by the Visitation Guidelines for Residential Aged Care Facilities (the Guidelines) as annexed to the Industry Code.

	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3
<b>Entry Restrictions</b>			
<b>Visitors</b>	Limited restrictions on visitors	Limited restrictions on visitors	Restricted visitation
<b>Groups (more than 2 people)</b>	Entry with appropriate screening, physical distancing and personal hygiene measures	No entry	
<b>Residents returning from Hospital (non-COVID-19 related illness)</b>	Appropriate screening procedures and monitoring	No entry unless clearance authorised by medical officer/public health unit	
<b>Residents returning from hospital (COVID-19 positive diagnosis)</b>	Entry permitted where “Release from isolation” criteria as outlines in the <i>Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) CDNA National Guidelines for Public Health Units</i> is met		
<b>Residential Care and Support</b>			
<b>Symptom Screening</b>	Yes		
<b>Isolation/Quarantine</b>	Asymptomatic – not required Symptomatic – isolation/quarantine required	Asymptomatic – not required Symptomatic – isolation/quarantine required with screening based on medical officer/public health officer advice	Screening and isolation/quarantine when symptomatic or based on medical officer/public health unit advice for asymptomatic
<b>Facility Common Areas</b>	Access allowed	Limited access with physical distancing or outdoors	Restricted, based on government directives
<b>Visitation Limitations</b>			
<b>Time limits</b>	Consistent with pre-COVID arrangements		Limitations based on government directives
<b>Visitor limits</b>	Small groups allowed with appropriate risk management procedures in place	Maximum 2 visitors at any one time per resident	Limitations based on government directives

<b>Age limits</b>	None	Limitations based on government directives	
<b>Supervision</b>	Consistent with pre-COVID arrangements	Escort to and from resident's room	
<b>Flu vaccination</b>	Yes		
<b>Physical distancing</b>	Yes		
<b>Resident External Appointments and Gatherings</b>			
<b>Hospital</b>	Yes		
<b>GP or allied health service</b>	Yes	Yes (where in-reach not available)	Telehealth/in-reach preferable
<b>Small gatherings</b>	Yes	Yes – numbers/locations per government guidance where group is known and with appropriate physical distancing and hygiene	Allowed on a case by case basis - numbers/locations per government guidance where group is known and with appropriate physical distancing and hygiene, and with risk management plan
<b>Group excursions</b>	Yes	Yes – per government guidance and with appropriate physical distancing and personal hygiene	No

The full Guidelines can be found [here](#).

**If you have any questions about how the Industry Code and the Guidelines will impact on your service, please contact Gemma McGrath or Prue Campbell on 08 9321 0522.**