



# Using face coverings in residential aged care

Coronavirus (COVID-19) update 23 July 2020

## Who should read this?

This factsheet is for staff, workers, residents and visitors in residential aged care facilities (RACF).

In addition, staff in RACF should follow the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services' [PPE Guidance for residential aged care](#).

## Why are face coverings required?

People living in metropolitan Melbourne and Mitchell Shire are now required to wear a face covering when leaving home, following a higher number of coronavirus (COVID-19) cases.

Wearing a face covering provides an additional physical barrier and helps to reduce community transmission.

## What are the requirements for staff and workers?

All staff and workers in RACFs are **required** to wear single use face masks (surgical masks), and follow this advice:

- perform hand hygiene before and after putting on the mask
- do not touch the front of your mask while putting it on, wearing it or taking it off
- the mask must cover the mouth and nose
- masks should not be worn for more than four hours
- masks should be changed before four hours if the mask is soiled, contaminated, damaged or damp
- if masks are removed, they must be immediately disposed of
- masks must be removed during breaks
- masks must not be pulled down to eat or drink or worn around the neck.

Staff must undertake a risk assessment as to whether other PPE is required when providing care to residents.

Please refer to [PPE Guidance for residential aged care](#).

## What are the requirements for visitors?

Visitors within restricted areas of metropolitan Melbourne and Mitchell Shire, like other members of the community, are required to wear a face covering when they leave their house ([some exemptions apply](#)).

Visitors who are attending a RACFS in other parts of Victoria, should also wear a face covering in RACFs due to the vulnerability of older Victorians to the virus.

All visitors must continue to practice physical distancing, respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene within the RACFs.

If visitors do not have a suitable face covering, the RACF should consider providing a single use face mask for visitors to wear while visiting.

General advice about wearing face coverings is available <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/face-masks-victoria-covid-19>

## Should residents wear a face covering if they are leaving the RACF?

Yes, in the restricted areas of metropolitan Melbourne and Mitchell Shire, wearing a face covering when leaving your home is a requirement ([some exemptions apply](#)).

In other parts of Victoria, residents who are leaving a RACF may wish to wear a face covering for their protection. This is particularly the case if they are unable to physically distance.

General advice about wearing face coverings is available <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/face-masks-victoria-covid-19>

## Can I take my face covering off if someone I am communicating with can't hear me?

You can remove your face covering if you are communicating with a person who is hearing impaired, where the ability to see the mouth is essential for communication.

Where hearing or communication is difficult a face shield or communication board should be considered in addition to physical distancing, respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene.

However, if there is an outbreak, a face covering must not be removed and protective PPE principles followed.

## What are the PPE requirements if there is an outbreak?

For staff who are working in a RACF where there is an outbreak, or where they are working with a COVID-19 positive resident, please refer to [PPE Guidance for residential aged care](#).

Please also refer to the [COVID-19 Residential Aged Care Facilities Plan for Victoria](#).

## Access to face masks for RACFs

RACFs are responsible for sourcing face masks (and other PPE) through their usual supply chains. However, in recognition of national supply issues, the Commonwealth Government has developed a process to support aged care providers including RACFs to access PPE.

Aged Care providers can request PPE by emailing [agedcareCOVIDPPE@health.gov.au](mailto:agedcareCOVIDPPE@health.gov.au)

Please also refer to [Access to PPE for Residential Aged Care Facilities in Victoria](#)

## Where can I get more information?

The Victorian and Commonwealth governments have developed coronavirus (COVID-19) aged care specific web pages with resources and guidelines.

The situation and action required is changing. We recommend you regularly check these websites and subscribe to updates.

### **Department of Health and Human Services (Victoria)**

Coronavirus (COVID-19) advice for the aged care sector: [dhhs.vic.gov.au/aged-care-sector-coronavirus-disease-covid-19](https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/aged-care-sector-coronavirus-disease-covid-19)

Victoria's coronavirus (COVID-19) daily update: [dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus-covid-19-daily-update](https://dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus-covid-19-daily-update)

**Department of Health (Commonwealth)**

Coronavirus (COVID-19) advice for the health and aged care sector: [health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-for-the-health-and-aged-care-sector](https://health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-for-the-health-and-aged-care-sector)

Coronavirus (COVID-19) advice for people in aged care facilities: [health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert/advice-for-people-at-risk-of-coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-for-people-in-aged-care-facilities](https://health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert/advice-for-people-at-risk-of-coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-for-people-in-aged-care-facilities)

Australian health alerts: [health.gov.au/news/health-alerts](https://health.gov.au/news/health-alerts)