

# Additional precautions for people vulnerable to respiratory illness



This factsheet is for use by people at higher risk of respiratory illness, their families and carers. Your GP will be able to advise you whether you are considered to be at higher risk. People at higher risk may be older people, people with a disability or people who have significant health conditions, including immunocompromise. The information provides advice on additional measures that can be taken to manage COVID-19, influenza (flu) or other respiratory viruses safely in the home.

If you have tested positive for COVID-19 you must follow the advice in [Testing positive to COVID-19 and managing COVID-19 safely at home](#) and consider the advice in [COVID-19: Information for people at higher risk of severe illness](#).

If you are a household or close contact you must follow the advice in the [NSW Health household and close contact guidelines](#).

## Keeping everyone safe when there is COVID-19 or flu in the house

### Physically distance

- **COVID-19 positive people** must self-isolate. It is important to keep the person as separate as possible. If they can safely do so, they should stay and sleep in a room by themselves and use a separate bathroom where possible. This will depend on their care needs and level of independence.

They should avoid common areas where possible, wear a mask if using a shared area and wipe down all surfaces with disinfectant after use.

It is important not to share household items including dishes, cups, towels and bedding. Wash these items thoroughly with soap and water after use.

- **Household members with symptoms** must self-isolate and get tested. They should be separated from other household members and avoid shared areas where possible. If using a shared area wear a mask.
- **Household members that do not have symptoms** should wear masks in shared areas.
- Where a household member is providing care, decide on one person to interact with the positive person. Where possible, this person should not be at higher risk of severe illness and should be fully vaccinated. Where possible, both people should wear masks, be in a well-ventilated room and should practice good hand hygiene.
- If external care providers are providing care, make sure they know that there is a COVID-19 or flu positive person in the household. They should wear [appropriate PPE](#) when entering the household and providing care. Where possible the person providing care to a person who is positive should avoid contact with other household members. If this is not possible, careful use of PPE with a full change of PPE between each client is important.

### Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Additional precautions should be taken where possible:

- Where possible, the positive person should wear a mask while a carer or support worker is in the room.
- Carers and support staff should wear a N95/P2 respirator mask and eye protection and consider also using a long sleeved, non-fabric gown and nitrile gloves while caring for the COVID-19 positive person. The carer must change PPE before providing care to each resident. For flu and other respiratory viruses eye protection and a surgical mask should be worn.
- All household members should wear a mask in shared areas and minimise their time together, even if they do not have symptoms. As people can be infectious before symptoms develop, this will reduce the risk of spreading the illness while someone is developing an infection.

### Practice good hand hygiene

- Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use an alcohol-based hand sanitiser:
  - before entering a shared area
  - before touching things used by other people

- after using the bathroom
- after coughing or sneezing
- before putting on, and after removing face masks, and
- before eating or drinking.
- Ensure all surfaces that are frequently touched by household members, particularly the person who is sick, are wiped down after use with household disinfectant or diluted bleach solution. These include doorknobs and bathroom fixtures.
- Cover coughs and sneezes.

## Avoid high risk settings

All [Household contacts of COVID-19 positive people](#) must:

- Avoid high risk settings (healthcare, aged care, other disability care or correctional facilities) for 7 days after the last person in the home tested positive for COVID-19. This does not include where a resident requires care, or there are particular circumstances and they have permission from the facility to visit (e.g. end of life visits).
- Avoid contact with other people at high risk of severe illness, where possible.
- If the home is a high risk setting (e.g. a disability care or residential aged care facility) be sure to:
  - limit your interaction with others
  - wear a mask when outside your individual room, and
  - ensure bathroom facilities are kept clean if shared
  - if RAT kits are readily available the contact may wish to do a RAT before leaving their room at the beginning of each day.
- If support workers attend the home they should follow the PPE advice above.
- Avoid large or crowded indoor gatherings where they will be in contact with groups of people that they don't live with, for 14 days, where possible.
- Wear a mask if you are likely to come in contact with other people.

Household members of people with other respiratory illnesses should also consider following these instructions to help minimise the risk of spreading illnesses to other vulnerable people.

## Test

- All higher risk household members with symptoms should contact their GP and be tested quickly for COVID-19 and flu by PCR so that antiviral medication can be prescribed if appropriate.
- [Household contacts of COVID-19 positive people](#) should consider doing a RAT before attending high risk settings for a further 7 days (day 8 to 14) as they are at risk of illness for 14 days after being exposed to someone with COVID-19.

## Workers providing services to a COVID-19 / flu positive clients

If you are employed as a support worker, you should continue to provide essential care but should take additional precautions.

Employers have responsibility under the [NSW Work Health and Safety Act 2011](#) to ensure a safe working environment, including managing COVID-19 risks.

## Accessing support

If you need additional support, contact your GP, NDIS or Aged Care provider or Aged Care Connect.

If you live in a Disability Care Facility, additional guidance is provided for facilities in [Guidance for Disability Care Facilities on the public health management of Acute Respiratory Infections \(including COVID-19 and Influenza\)](#).

If you live in a Residential Aged Care Facility additional guidance is provided for the facility in [Guidance for Residential Aged Care Facilities on the public health management of Acute Respiratory Infections \(including COVID-19 and Influenza\)](#)

## COVID-19 and flu support

- If you have health questions that are not a medical emergency, call your GP or the NSW Health Flu and COVID-19 Care at Home Support Line on 1800 960 933. You can also call healthdirect 24/7 for free on 1800 022 222 for fast, expert health advice from registered nurses.
- If symptoms become severe call Triple Zero (000) immediately.
- If you need practical assistance during self-isolation, call the NSW Health Isolation Support Line on 1800 943 553.