



# Caring through Crisis: COVID-19 handbook

To be used as a reference to the  
'Caring through Crisis' training module

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# Contents

You can click to view the topic of interest\*

## **Introduction .....4**

## **Staying safe through COVID-19.....5**

1. Stay updated ..... 5
2. Wash your hands..... 5
3. Practice good hygiene..... 5
4. Keep your distance..... 6
5. Stay at home..... 6
6. Wear a mask..... 6
7. Get tested ..... 7
8. Isolate at home ..... 7
9. Stay safe ..... 8
10. Be prepared ..... 8

## **Self-care .....9**

11. Mindfulness..... 9
12. Look after your mental health .....10
13. Avoid news overload .....11
14. Stay well .....11
15. Stay connected .....11
16. Stay active.....12
17. Take a break .....12

## **Resuming your services and supports..... 13**

18. Things to think about ..... 13
19. Consider the alternatives ..... 14
20. Talk to your service provider ..... 15
21. If you need more support..... 15

## **Entering the community..... 16**

22. Things to think about ..... 16
23. Care home visits ..... 16
24. Reduce the risk..... 17
25. Ask questions..... 18

## **Impacts on the person you care for..... 19**

## **Appendix A: Self-care action plan.....20**

## **Appendix B: Personal protective equipment (PPE) guide.....21**

## **Appendix C: Resources list.....22**

\* To return to this content page, click Alt and Left Arrow keys if using a PC, or Option and Left Arrow keys if using a Mac.

# Introduction

Carers NSW has developed this handbook and the training module 'Caring through Crisis: COVID-19' to support carers through the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. We understand every situation is unique, so please utilise the information that you feel is relevant for your caring role.

Caring can be physically and emotionally draining. Many carers put the needs of the person they are caring for before their own. It is important that carers look after their health and wellbeing to be able to continue with their caring responsibilities.

The handbook provides general information on staying safe, taking care of your physical and mental health, and deciding when, and if, you are ready to resume usual services and supports. We also discuss some new challenges you and the person you care for may be facing at this time.

If you are feeling overwhelmed, you can talk to a trained counsellor 24 hours a day, 7 days a week by calling the Coronavirus Mental Wellbeing Support Service on 1800 512 348. For a free telephone interpreter call 131 450 and say the language you need. The Interpreter will then connect you to the Coronavirus Mental Wellbeing Support Service.

If you are struggling to cope, you may also call Lifeline on 13 11 14 for 24 hour crisis support and suicide prevention services.

If you need support with your caring role, visit the [Carer Gateway](#) or call on 1800 422 737 weekdays, 8am till 5pm. Carer Gateway is a national support service funded by the Australian Government. It offers tailored supports and services for carers to help manage challenges, reduce stress and plan ahead.



# Staying safe through COVID-19

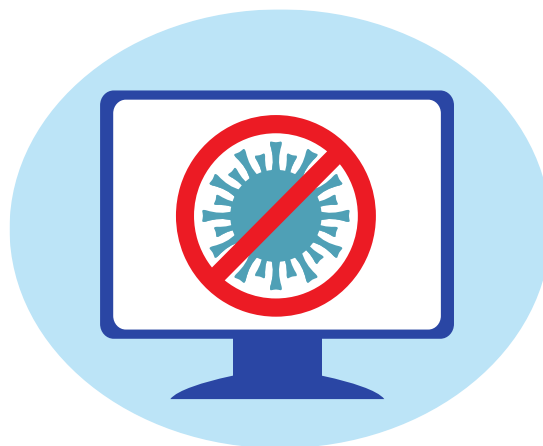
## 1. Stay updated

Official advice can change quickly, so it is important to stay on top of the restrictions and guidelines in your local area.

The detail below is based on information provided by the National and State Government to minimise the risk of COVID-19 transmission, and its impact on individuals and the community.

You can visit these websites or call the National coronavirus and COVID-19 vaccine helpline on 1800 020 080 (or the National Relay Service on 1300 555 727) for up to date advice.

- The [Australian Government Department of Health website](#) has daily updates, Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs), the latest news, current facts and figures, travel advice and contact details.
- The NSW Government has [translated and easy to read resources](#) on COVID-19 as well as information on the latest [border restrictions](#).
- The NSW Department of Health website provides the latest information on what [you can and can't do under the rules](#).
- NSW Health is working closely with the Australian Government on the COVID-19 vaccination program. Visit [here](#) for information on getting vaccinated and vaccine safety. Always consult your GP about your individual circumstances.
- The NSW Department of Communities and Justice have [information for seniors, people with disability and carers](#) on their website.
- To check for symptoms and whether you need to seek medical advice, Healthdirect Australia has developed a [COVID-19 Symptom Checker](#).
- Carers NSW has updates and advice for carers [here](#) and tip sheets for carers [here](#).
- The [COVIDSafe app](#) can be installed on Apple and Android phones to help identify people exposed to COVID-19. Health officials can only access this information with your permission.



## 2. Wash your hands

Keeping hands clean is one of the most important steps we can take to avoid getting sick and spreading germs to others. People frequently touch their eyes, nose, and mouth without even realising it.

Practice simple hand hygiene by washing hands regularly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Use alcohol-based hand sanitiser when you cannot use soap and water. Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.

Watch the World Health Organisation [handwashing demonstration video](#) (23 March 2020).

## 3. Practice good hygiene

Safe respiratory practices are important, like coughing or sneezing into your elbow, or a tissue. Put the tissue straight into the bin. Then wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.

Clean and disinfect surfaces you use often, like door handles, light switches, kitchen benches. Clean and disinfect objects you touch frequently like mobile phones, car keys, wallets, remote controls.

Continue to wash your hands regularly with soap and water, or alcohol-based hand sanitiser.



## 4. Keep your distance

Keep a physical distance from others – stay 1.5m away when you can. Do not shake hands, hug or kiss as a greeting. Avoid large groups in line with government restrictions.

Keep checking NSW Health advice for [limits to people visiting your home](#) as it may change based on where you live.

## 5. Stay at home

Stay at home if you are unwell – even if you only have mild cold symptoms like a runny nose, sore or scratchy throat, loss of smell or loss of taste. If you are unwell, seek advice from your GP. In most instances you will be encouraged to get tested for COVID-19.

## 6. Wear a mask

Wearing a face mask in NSW is now recommended by health experts in areas where community transmission of COVID-19 is high or whenever physical distancing is not possible. Read more here [Facemasks: How they protect you and when to use them](#).

Wearing a face mask helps to contain droplets when a person coughs or sneezes, and reduces the chance of COVID-19 spreading.

Single-use masks (commonly called surgical masks) and reusable cloth masks both help to prevent the spread of COVID-19, if used correctly.

Buy single-use surgical masks from reputable retail outlets including chemists, hardware stores and other shops. Examples include Office Works, Bunnings and Chemist Warehouse.

People with an NDIS plan or a Home Care Package may be able to [redeem the cost of face masks](#) directly from their package – talk to your provider to see if this is an option for you.

If you are having trouble finding a face mask, your provider may be able to help. Providers can access the [National Medical Stockpile](#).

Reusable cloth masks should be made from at least three layers of breathable fabric to ensure adequate protection. A simple scarf or piece of fabric would be better than not wearing anything. Reusable masks should be washed daily and be completely dry before using again.

If you choose to wear a mask, it is important to wear it properly:

- wash your hands before putting it on or taking it off
- make sure the mask covers your nose and mouth and fits snugly under your chin, over the bridge of your nose and against the sides of your face
- do not touch the front of your mask while wearing or removing it
- do not allow the mask to hang around your neck or under your nose
- do not reuse single use masks
- wash and dry reusable masks after use and store in a clean dry place.

Watch the World Health Organisation video on [how to wear a fabric face mask safely](#).

## 7. Get tested

If you or someone you care for has COVID-19 symptoms, seek advice from a GP or the National coronavirus and COVID-19 vaccine helpline (call 1800 020 080) about how to get tested.

You should get tested if you are exposed to a person with a suspected or diagnosed case of COVID-19, are directed by your GP or live in a hotspot where there is a call for people to be tested.

The testing process may be quite stressful for a person with disability or a person living with cognitive impairment. The person conducting the test will be wearing full personal protective equipment which can be scary and confusing. The test itself can also be uncomfortable.

Where possible explain to the person what the testing process will involve; involve people the person you care for trusts and have them present during testing; explain the person's needs with the person conducting the test; and try to have the test conducted in a familiar location like the GP's office.

In some instances it may be too stressful for the person with disability or cognitive impairment to complete the test. If there are no alternatives available, the person will need to isolate at home. You will need to notify the local public health authority and seek further directions.

[Read more about who should be tested](#), where testing can be done, and how to explain the testing process to a person with disability.

If you have a test for COVID-19 you must stay at home and self-isolate until you receive the results of your test. In some cases you may need to self-isolate for 14 days, even if your test result is negative. It is best to check with your GP about your personal circumstances.

If the test is positive your GP or public health unit will provide you with advice and explain the [self-isolation guidelines](#).

If you are having trouble self-isolating due to your caring role, see if your provider can offer more practical support or talk to Carer Gateway on 1800 422 737.

## 8. Isolate at home

You will need to self-isolate if you have COVID-19, are a close contact of someone with COVID-19, a returned traveller and are exempt from hotel quarantine, or you have been tested for COVID-19 and are waiting for the results. There are [guidelines to follow](#) which vary depending on your circumstances.

The person at risk of, or diagnosed with, COVID-19 must stay at home and separate from others in the household. Members of the household are considered close contacts and must also self-isolate.

It may not always be possible for the person to self-isolate. You may be in close contact as part of your caring responsibilities. You may live in a large household. You may share a bathroom or bedroom. It is important to continue to wash your hands, keep your distance where possible, and consider wearing a mask when in close contact.

You can only leave your home in an emergency, when seeking medical advice or medical supplies.





The only person who can enter your place during this time is someone who usually lives there; someone delivering food or essential items; or someone there for medical or emergency purposes.

If you cannot self-isolate from the person with suspected or diagnosed COVID-19 you should continue to self-isolate for a further 14 days after that person has been cleared to leave isolation.

If you are having trouble understanding restrictions and how they apply to you, contact the National coronavirus and COVID-19 vaccine helpline on 1800 020 080.

If you need help getting food, medicine or other essential goods and services, Service NSW can assist. Go to their website and complete the [service assistance finder](#) questionnaire or call 13 77 88.

## 9. Stay safe

As people cooperate with physical distancing directions, self-isolation and quarantine, there is a risk that domestic and family violence will increase. Call the NSW Domestic Violence Line on 1800 65 64 63 or [visit the website](#) if you have concerns. Available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

## 10. Be prepared

When you care for someone, putting your life on hold while you deal with sudden illness or emergency may be challenging. Having a plan makes it easy for someone to take over from you in a hurry.

Some specific risks to consider during COVID-19 are being isolated at home for a long time; you or the person you support developing symptoms; you or the person you care for contracting COVID-19.

You may wish to plan for these scenarios and put steps in place so you and the person you care for receives the services and supports you need.

Planning may include how you will stay in touch, pay the bills, source food and essential items, take care of your physical and mental health, access medical care and supplies, travel safely and access important services and supports for the person you care for.

The Queenslanders with Disability Network has been working with a team at The University of Sydney to prepare a [comprehensive guide](#) to help people with disability to get the facts about Coronavirus (COVID-19) and make a plan for how they will manage the impact of the situation.

This is a good time to check your emergency care plan is up to date and shared with the people that support you, such as your GP, service provider, family and friends.

Carer Gateway has advice on [planning for emergencies](#) and a template you can use for your own plan if needed. For more help with emergency planning or emergency respite call 1800 422 737.



# Self-care

Looking after yourself means taking care of your physical and emotional health. You can do this by identifying your own needs and taking steps to meet them. It is important to take proper care of yourself and treat yourself as kindly as you treat others.

Explore ways to address your mental health during this time. Watch this [video from Babylon Health](#) for some tips and techniques to help get you through your day.

Be kind to yourself if you struggle to keep to a routine or find time for self-care. Each day will be different and each person's caring situation is unique.

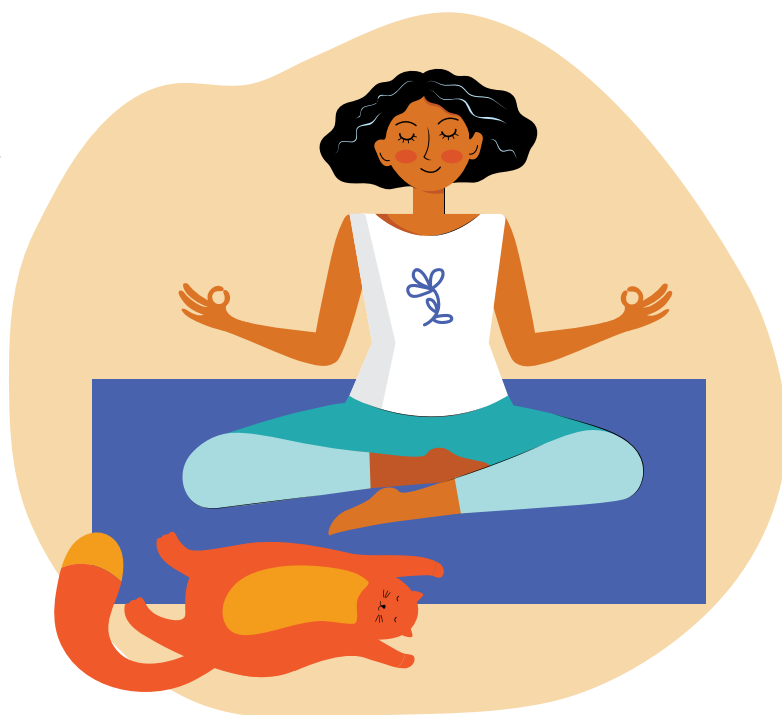
Look for opportunities to squeeze in self-care throughout the day. For example:

- **If you have 10 seconds:** Pause, take deep breaths and think of something you may be grateful for, like the sun shining, fresh air, the birds singing
- **If you have 1 minute:** move your body. Get up, roll your neck, touch your toes and BREATHE!
- **If you have 5 minutes:** get inspired. Read an inspiration piece or listen to a favourite song
- **If you have 15 minutes:** Sit with yourself, meditate, watch the sunrise, or write in a journal. Build in some time in the morning to set the tone for the day and avoid or limit using devices like smart phones
- **If you have 30 minutes:** change your scenery. Have a picnic lunch outdoors.

The self-care action plan can be used to record your own health and wellbeing needs as well as how to address these needs and who can help. See [Appendix A](#).

## 11. Mindfulness

[Mindfulness](#) is the practice of paying attention in the moment. It helps you focus on the here and now, so you do not dwell on the past or worry about the future. This can benefit your physical and mental health.



We spend so much time thinking over things that have happened in the past, or worrying about things that may happen in the future, that often we forget to appreciate or enjoy the moment. Mindfulness is a way of bringing us back to experience life as it happens.

When you're mindful, it helps slow down your thoughts and clear your head. It can help you be more aware of yourself, your body and the environment. It can also slow down your nervous system, help you relax and reduce stress.

There are a number of mindfulness activities you may want to try such as going for a walk and focusing on your surroundings. Focus on what you see, smell, hear, and feel without judging how you feel in that moment as good or bad.

Getting close to nature and being outdoors in the fresh air is great for your mental and physical health; even if you can only afford to spend ten minutes in the back yard.



Practise relaxation techniques. Close your eyes and breathe in slowly and deeply through your nose and then out through your mouth. Repeat ten times. This is a way of switching off, even if just for a few moments.

Try colouring in or painting by numbers. The concentration needed can help you become absorbed in the moment. There are a number of websites offering free colouring in pages for adults and children that can be downloaded. Search online by googling 'colouring in for adults.'

Completing puzzles, crosswords, Sudoku, jigsaw puzzles, and building LEGO can also be beneficial.

## 12. Look after your mental health

Caring for someone can be difficult at any time, but COVID-19 has raised carer stress to a whole new level. The disruption, uncertainty, concerns for yourself and the person you care for, changes to your services and supports and COVID-19 restrictions can lead to carers feeling stressed and overwhelmed.

It is normal to feel a range of emotions, such as stress, worry, anxiety, boredom, or low mood. You may feel distressed and overwhelmed by the constant news and amount of information about the situation.

If you or someone you are with is in immediate danger, please call 000.

Speak to family or friends if you are feeling overwhelmed and let them know how you are feeling. Try to maintain a healthy lifestyle, stay informed, stay positive and access support when you need it.

[Head to Health](#) has trusted information and digital resources to help support your mental health and wellbeing during this time.

Talk to your GP who may refer you to local mental health services like a psychologist. You may benefit from a [Mental Health Treatment Plan](#) where you work with your GP to identify your health care needs and set goals to address them. You may qualify for Medicare rebates on mental health services.

People who are facing COVID-19 quarantine or self-isolation restrictions may qualify for [10 additional Medicare subsidised psychological therapy sessions](#) when already working with their GP under their mental health treatment plan.

A free 24/7 Coronavirus Mental Wellbeing Support Service is designed by [Beyond Blue](#) to help people through the COVID-19 pandemic. If you are feeling worried or struggling to cope call on 1800 512 348.

A free COVID-19 support line for [senior Australians](#) has been established in conjunction with the Council on the Ageing Australia, National Seniors Australia, the Older Persons Advocacy Network and Dementia Australia. Call on 1800 171 866 (weekdays from 8.30am till 6pm).

Other services that may be of assistance 24/7 include:

- Lifeline on 13 11 14
- Suicide Call Back Service on 1300 659 467
- National Indigenous Critical Response Service 1800 805 801
- NSW Mental Health Line on 1800 011 511
- NSW Domestic Violence Line 1800 656 463
- Mensline 1300 789 978
- Kids Helpline 1800 551 800.

[QLife web chat](#) is available daily (3pm till midnight), or by phone on 1800 184 527 (6pm till 10pm). QLife encourages LGBTI communities to use [Head to Health](#) for COVID-19 support and Beyond Blue for [tips to look after your mental health](#).

If you need emotional support with your caring role, visit the [Carer Gateway](#) or call on 1800 422 737 (weekdays, 8am till 5pm).

## 13. Avoid news overload

Limit your exposure to news and programs about the COVID-19 pandemic to get a sense of control over what you consume.

Beyond Blue describes a technique to [sort fact from fiction](#) and check information is credible:

- Stop and think before you take anything as fact.
- Investigate the source and question who is providing this information.
- Find better coverage. Cross-check the information with trusted sources.
- Trace claims, quotes, and media to the original context. In other words, click back to find the original source of the information.

## 14. Stay well

Keep up with your regular health checks and seek support if you are feeling stressed or anxious.

Maintain a healthy diet. A good diet will improve your physical health and give you strength and stamina. Try not to be too hard on yourself on days when you do not eat as well as you would like.

Stick to a routine. Try to get up and go to bed at the same time each day, eat regular meals and plan time for chores as well as activities you enjoy.

Find time for you. It could be reading a book, spending time in the garden, cooking, meditating, listening to music or going for a walk. Take time out to do an activity that you like. It helps to recharge the batteries and allows you to better cope with stress.

Get a good night's sleep. Avoid coffee or tea in the evening. Explore ways to wind down before bed. Try meditation, listening to music or reading if you have difficulty falling asleep. [Headspace](#) offers a number of free programs to help you sleep and meditate.

Practise relaxation techniques. This is a way of switching off, even if just for a few moments. Close your eyes and breathe in slowly and deeply through your nose and out through your mouth. Repeat ten times.

## 15. Stay connected

Physical distancing does not mean we cannot keep connected. We may be physically apart but we need to stay socially and emotionally connected.

There are lots of ways to stay connected with friends and family, from phone calls and letters to online video calls such as ZOOM, Skype and Facetime.

[Be Connected Australia](#) offers free online courses to senior Australians on how to stay connected during COVID-19. [Carers NSW](#) also offers a list of digital resources for carers to stay connected.

Make a list of friends or family members you like to keep in contact with and schedule time/s in your diary to connect with by phone or video link during the week.

Checking in with other people over the phone who may be feeling lonely can be a good way to feel more connected and creates a sense of community. Consider sending a text or writing a letter.

Maintain your regular social catch ups where you can maintain physical distancing, whether it is a book club, trivia night, family dinner or evening chats with friends using online platforms available.

You can also feel closer to the important people in your life by thinking about them and looking at photographs. Paint a picture for a grandparent or write a funny card to a grandchild and send it.



Carers NSW has a [Carer Peer Connect](#) program which offers safe online opportunities for carers to be linked with each other to receive and provide assistance and support. You may wish to join a group, have an online chat, attend a webinar or learn more skills to support you in your caring role.

Carer Gateway offers a number of opportunities for carers to connect. The In-Person Peer Support service helps carers catch up, make connections, share stories, knowledge and experiences. There are four facilitated sessions and participants sometimes go on to form their own peer support groups. [Visit the Carer Gateway website](#) or call on 1800 422 737 to speak to someone about this service.

You may also be interested in the [Carer Gateway Community Forum](#) where carers can register, join conversations, ask questions and connect with carers.



## 16. Stay active

Staying active is a great way to maintain both your physical and emotional health and wellbeing.

Keep up your usual daily activities such as washing, dressing, eating, cleaning, and watching your favourite TV and radio programmes.

Make a list of jobs and pleasurable activities and create a daily routine you enjoy. Having planned activities can provide a sense of something to look forward to and add structure to your day.

Try to find time to exercise, even 5 minutes can be beneficial. It eases both physical and mental stress. Find an activity you enjoy (walking, yoga, stretching, or jogging). Remember to keep a good distance from people walking around you and wash your hands when you return home. You may wish to wear a facemask for additional protection.

[Get Healthy NSW](#) has free telephone-based coaching to support you with eating healthy and staying active. Call 1300 806 258 weekdays from 8am till 8pm. Try not to be too hard on yourself on days when you are not as active as you would like.

Try something new. Cook a dish you have never cooked before, start a new puzzle or book, learn a new skill, or reach out for support in a way you have not done before.

Develop a weekly calendar which can include times for exercise, times to call/connect with friends and family, times for relaxation, and times for undertaking jobs or tasks around the house such as cleaning out the fridge, sorting out photographs, culling your wardrobe.

Start a journal recalling special moments, family trips, and funny experiences that you can share with family and friends, including photos.

## 17. Take a break

Respite is when you take a short break from your caring responsibilities, from a couple of hours to several weeks. This gives you time to focus on your own needs and recharge the batteries.

Sometimes a family member or friend can provide the respite for you. They may provide the support in your home or have the person you care for visit their home.

Carers may also qualify for a professional respite service. This is where a paid care worker provides the care you usually provide while you have a break. The care can be provided in your home, a day care centre, cottage, or nursing home. Talk to Carer Gateway on 1800 422 737 about your needs as a carer and to see whether you qualify for respite.

For carers of older people, talk to My Aged Care on 1800 200 422 to see if you can access [community respite](#) through the Commonwealth Home Support Program or whether you can have [residential respite](#) provided in a nursing home.

For carers of older people on a Home Care Package, talk to your provider to see if they can arrange some respite care through the package.

[Emergency respite](#) care can be arranged by calling Carer Gateway on 1800 422 737 and speaking to the local service provider.

# Resuming your services and supports

## 18. Things to think about

During the pandemic, some of the services and supports that you and the person you care for access may have been temporarily suspended or cancelled, either by yourself or by the provider.

It is helpful to think which services and supports are most important to you and whether there are ways in which they can be provided safely.

There are things you can do to reduce the risk when resuming services and supports, from physical distancing, asking questions, limiting the visitors to your home and limiting how long they stay.

When friends, family, service providers and others visit your home check they are well. Ask visitors to wash their hands when entering your home. Encourage them to keep their distance where possible.

Some services are considered **lower risk** than others. A service is low risk when there is no direct contact with you or the person you care for. It is low risk if you can limit the direct contact with anyone who may be vulnerable. It is also a good habit to clean any high touch surfaces before and after each visit, like door handles, light switches, counters and bathroom taps.

Lawn and garden services, for example, are low risk because the provider does not need to be face to face with the person you care for.

Domestic assistance or housework is low risk as you can screen the worker coming to your home and follow the recommended safety precautions (handwashing, wearing PPE and keeping your distance). As an added precaution you can place yourself and the person you care for in a different room to the one being cleaned.





You may feel confident using a transport service if the person is seated in the back seat of the car, opposite the driver, and high touch surfaces like doorhandles and seatbelt buckles are cleaned regularly.

Some services are considered **higher risk**. This includes services where there is physical contact, time spent in close proximity to others or there are large groups of people.

Higher risk services include personal care, nursing care and allied health services like physiotherapy and podiatry. The person providing the care is in close contact, usually for more than 15 minutes at a time.

You may want to slowly introduce some higher risk services, building up the duration and frequency of visits over time. For example – you may resume personal care services with 30 minute visits on alternative days rather than your regular 60 minute services every day.

There is greater risk catching public transport, going to the shops, joining in social groups and attending faith based services. It can also be higher risk when visiting the GP or chemist as you may be mixing with someone who is unwell.

New resources have been developed to support people at higher risk to make decisions about work, transport and social activities during COVID-19. There is a [Living](#)

[well in the COVID-19 pandemic tool](#) you may wish to download, and a [COVIDSafe action plan](#) for people who wish to manage their risks.

## 19. Consider the alternatives

There may be other options you can explore to reduce the number of high risk activities needed. From the way you manage health appointments to shopping for essential items and staying connected with family and friends.

You may be able to change the way you seek medical care and medical supplies by:

- Seeing if your GP or specialist uses telehealth (telephone or videoconference) rather than going to the surgery
- Asking if your GP, physiotherapist or podiatrist will visit you at home
- Calling the [National Home Doctor](#) for after-hours, bulk billed GP home visits. Call 13 74 25 from 6pm weekdays, all day Saturday, Sunday and public holidays
- Talking to your pathology collection centre to see if they offer home visits and asking your local pharmacy if they provide a home delivery service for your medications.

There are a number of ways to source groceries and essential items with less face to face contact, or without leaving home:

- Speak to your provider to see if a support worker can provide a shopping service
- Bigger supermarkets and retail outlets can offer a click and collect service (order online and pick up your delivery), or a home delivery service for a small fee.
- A number of retail and grocery stores are now offering a delivery service, so it is worth asking your local green grocer, butcher, supermarket, café and restaurant
- You may wish to try a delivered meal service like [Meals on Wheels](#) or see if a friend or family member can help.

Staying in touch:

- As mentioned above, you may be able explore other ways to stay connected with family and friends.
- Try phone or video calls, writing letters, sending text messages or using technology like Skype or Zoom.
- Talk to your provider or the Carer Gateway to explore options to access technology.



## 20. Talk to your service provider

It is important your service provider keeps in touch and communicates how they are adapting to the challenges of COVID-19 and how they can help you and the person you care for. The advice can change quite quickly and you need to be confident your provider is staying up-to-date.

You should feel confident your provider is following the latest health advice, providing the necessary training and equipment to staff and taking the required precautions.

In-home aged and disability care services can generally still be accessed, with some restrictions to protect the spread of COVID-19.

Workers do not usually wear personal protective equipment (mask, gloves, apron, and eyewear) unless they are doing a specific task like showering or there is a specific risk. In August 2020 workers in NSW have been directed to wear a facemask when providing direct services. This advice is subject to change based on the local transmission in your local area.

Continue to check [official sources](#) for the latest rules and recommendations. The Department of Health has recently published advice for disability support workers and home care workers on the wearing of personal protective equipment. See [Appendix B](#).

- Lifeline on 13 11 14
- Suicide Call Back Service on 1300 659 467
- Carer Gateway on 1800 422 737 (weekdays 8am - 5pm).

People with disability and their carers can contact:

- Disability Information Helpline on 1800 643 787 (weekdays 8am - 8pm, weekends 9am - 7pm) for information about Coronavirus or referral to counselling or advocacy.
- There are also alternative contact options for people living with a hearing or speech impairment or where an interpreter is needed.
- For people already receiving services and supports through the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), contact your service provider
- If you are not getting the support you need, you can contact: Carer Gateway on 1800 422 737 (weekdays 8am - 5pm) or National Disability Insurance Agency on 1800 800 110

Young carers can contact:

- Young Carer Program at Carers NSW on 02 9280 4744 (Weekdays 9am - 5pm)
- Carer Gateway on 1800 422 737 (Weekdays 8am - 5pm).
- Kids Helpline on 1800 551 800

## 21. If you need more support

If you or someone you care about is in immediate danger, please call 000.

If older people and their carers are not getting the support they need, contact:

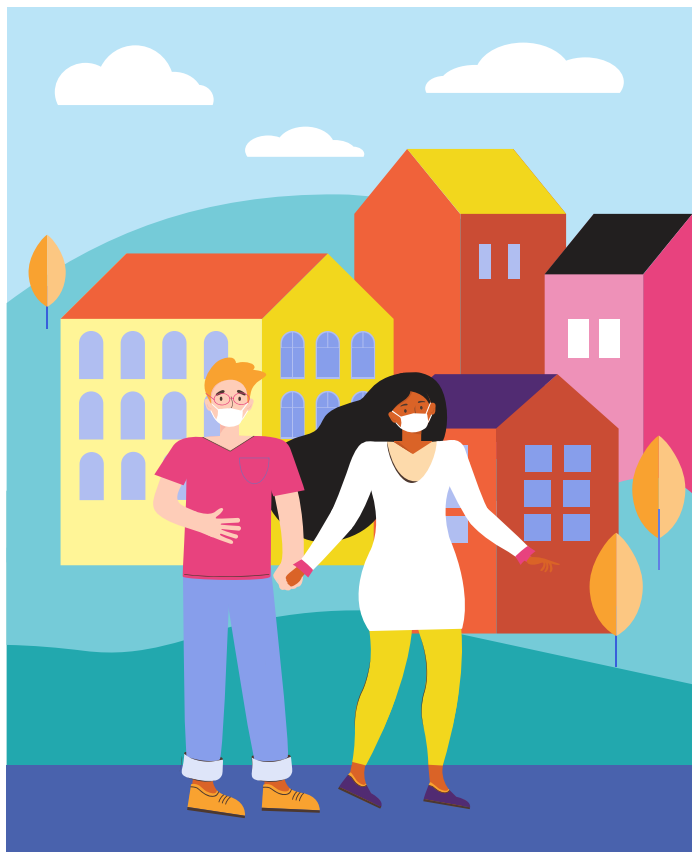
- Older Persons COVID-19 Support Line on 1800 171 866 (weekdays 8:30am - 6:00pm)
- Carer Gateway on 1800 422 737 (weekdays 8am - 5pm).
- Older Persons Advocacy Network (OPAN) on 1800 237 981 (6am - 10pm, 7 days)
- My Aged Care on 1800 200 422 (weekdays 8am - 8pm, Saturdays 10am - 2pm)

For people living with mental illness and their carers, contact:

- Coronavirus Mental Wellbeing Support Service on 1800 512 348
- NSW Mental Health Line on 1800 011 511



# Entering the community



## 22. Things to think about

Getting back into the community is good for our health and wellbeing, whether it is exercising, connecting with others, dining out, doing the shopping or returning to work.

How comfortable you feel can be influenced by the number of COVID-19 cases in your community and how people and businesses are behaving.

Some activities are low risk where you can maintain your physical distance. For example:

- Activities that are outdoors where you can maintain your distance like going for a walk or having a picnic in the park
- Going to a sporting event where there are tickets and allocated seats
- Going to outdoor markets where there is lots of space and it is not too crowded
- Using private transport where there is good hygiene, plenty of room, people wear masks when unwell and key surfaces are regularly cleaned.

Some activities are high risk where there are large groups of people and you may not be able to maintain physical distancing. For example:

- Activities that are indoors and may be crowded like shopping centres, cafes, clubs, pubs and restaurants
- Activities with lots of physical contact or vocalising like dancing, contact sports, choirs and places of worship
- Activities with shared equipment or objects like indoor gyms, functions or restaurants with shared meals and utensils.

You may wish to use the [COVIDSafe action plan](#) to manage your personal risks.

## 23. Care home visits

Many carers will be visiting and providing support to people in residential aged care (nursing homes), group and community homes, mental health units, hospital wards and rehabilitation units.

We recognise the caring responsibilities do not stop when someone is in a care home. For some of you, the responsibilities may be greater during this time. From ensuring the person's needs are met, to advocacy, supporting with communication and continuing to provide some aspects of personal care.



There has been a lot of disruption, confusion about what you can and cannot do, rules that keep changing, restrictions to visiting times and sometimes banned visits during the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is a good idea to check the care home understands and recognises you are a carer, has your contact details and any authorities you have in place, such as Enduring Guardianship. Check they understand the needs of the person you are caring for. You have the right to [speak up in support of your rights and the rights](#) of the person you care for.

Try to follow the care home requirements, such as having a flu vaccination, staying home when unwell and complying with visitor times.

For carers of people in a residential aged care facility:

- The Commonwealth Department of Health has a fact sheet called [Six Steps to Stop the Spread](#) for families and visitors, which you can download from the website.
- The Commonwealth Department of Health has a fact sheet called Coronavirus (COVID-19) information for families and residents on [restricted visits to residential aged care facilities](#) to guide you on visitor numbers and ways to stay in touch with your family member or friend.
- There is a new [industry code for visiting residential care](#) homes during COVID-19 which includes the rights and responsibilities of providers, residents and visitors.
- If you have concerns about visiting an aged care home please contact the [Older Person's Advocacy Network](#) (OPAN) or call 1800 237 981 daily from 6am till 10pm.

For carers of people receiving palliative care in a hospital setting:

- Any [restrictions or changes to visitor rules](#) during COVID-19 are decided locally.
- This includes decisions to prevent face-to-face visits, to restrict visitor numbers and times, the use of personal protective equipment and the screening of visitors.
- Virtual communication should be offered if it is too risky to have face to face visits.
- Care should be taken to reduce isolation and distress for both patients and carers.

## 24. Reduce the risk

When returning to your local community, you may be exposed to someone with COVID-19. That person may not realise they have COVID-19 or they may go out thinking it is safe to do so.

There are a number of things you can do to reduce the risk of infection. You may wish to wear a facemask, carry hand sanitiser and use your own pen when signing in to any venues you visit.

Some businesses (including pubs, clubs, bars, restaurants, cafes) need to keep a record of all staff and customers visiting their premises. This helps NSW Health trace anyone at risk of contracting COVID-19.

Some venues have a written list to collect your contact number and the time you visited. If you are worried about privacy, just record your first name and phone number rather than your full name. If you use the pen provided be sure to sanitise your hands afterwards.



Some venues will have an electronic bar code system. When you arrive at the venue, hover your phone camera over the bar code. Your smartphone reads the bar code and directs you to a sign in page where you can add your details electronically. You can always ask for assistance from a member of staff.

When using public transport try to travel outside the busy times when people are travelling to work or to school. Try to travel after 9am and before 3pm. If the train, bus or ferry is too crowded, wait for the next service. In NSW commuters are being encouraged to wear a facemask when using public transport.

When shopping for food and essentials try to visit smaller shopping centres or stand-alone shops where possible. Try to avoid busy times by shopping early in the morning or late afternoons and evenings. Use hand sanitiser on entering and leaving each shop.

In NSW people are being encouraged to wear a facemask when going to the supermarket and larger shopping centres as it can be difficult to keep your distance from others.

When eating out at cafes and restaurants, book ahead of time so you have a designated seat. When you make the booking, ask about the venue's COVIDSafe plan. Avoid places that seem crowded, and do not have a sign in register or hand sanitiser for you to use.

Be careful of your hygiene. Avoid frequently touched surfaces or sharing utensils. Wash or sanitise your hands on arrival and when leaving a venue. You may want to clean down your handbag, wallet, and mobile phone when you arrive home.

## 25. Ask questions

If you are considering an outing or activity arranged by your service provider, ask questions. It is important to know how you are getting to and from your activity. Will you be indoors where there is a higher risk of contracting COVID-19 or outdoors? Will you be seated or standing? Ask whether people will keep their distance. Will it be crowded? Will there be singing or dancing? Will you be eating? Will people be sharing food or platters or utensils?

The answers to these questions will help you determine the level of risk you face and any steps you may take to reduce the risk. As mentioned earlier, the [COVIDSafe action plan](#) is a great tool for you to manage your personal risks.



# Impacts on the person you care for

COVID-19 brings new challenges and concerns for the person you care for. It may be difficult to follow the rules and recommendations. Fear of COVID-19, disruption to the usual care and COVID-19 rules and restrictions can have an effect on physical and mental health.

Older people, people living in care homes, people living with disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and people living with chronic conditions and compromised immune systems are more at risk of serious illness should they contract COVID-19.

The person you care for may be unable to understand or follow COVID-19 safe guidelines. Physical distancing and practicing safe COVID-19 hygiene may be difficult. You may need to spend large amounts of time in close contact when providing their care and support.

If the person you care for has symptoms or is suspected of having COVID-19 it may not be possible to self-isolate or have the person undergo testing.

You or the person you care for may be upset, sad or anxious when wearing or seeing others wearing a face mask. [Facemasks can trigger unpleasant memories](#) like being robbed or assaulted, undergoing past medical procedures or being in recent bushfires.

There can be a lack of social cues from facial expressions when people are wearing facemasks, face shields and goggles, and people who are hearing impaired may find it difficult to understand when they are unable to lip read.

The impact of physical distancing, travel restrictions, disruptions to care and support may result in fear, anxiety, and social isolation. There is a greater risk of mental health concerns and behaviour changes.

For carers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people:

- The Australian government has specific [advice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people](#) and remote communities, from stopping the spread, to staying in touch and where to get help.
- There are extra [resources available](#) including posters, infographics, radio broadcasts, videos and newsletters.



For carers of people living with autism:

- Aspect has a range of [supports and resources](#) on COVID-19 including videos and a private Facebook group for autistic adults. Call 1800 277 328
- Call the 24 hour Autism Hotline on 1300 222 777

For carers of people living with dementia:

- Dementia Australia has a number of [Dementia Help Sheets to navigate COVID-19](#)
- You can call the National Dementia Helpline on 1800 100 500 weekdays 8am till 8pm for information about dementia and help to follow the COVID-19 advice.

# Appendix A: Self-care action plan

As a carer, it is important to look after your own physical and emotional wellbeing.






In the table below, write any personal health and wellbeing needs you may have in the first column. Then record what you will do to address each need in the second column. Use column three to record when you will undertake each action. If any resources and/or support will be required note these in column four.

Health or wellbeing need:	What I will do: (Actions)	When I will do it: (Frequency or timeframe)	Resources or support I will need: (If any)

# Appendix B: Personal protective equipment (PPE) guide

Below is the Guide to Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for disability care providers preventing the spread of COVID-19. (Department of Health fact sheet 3/07/2020).

**Personal care** is hands on care, care provided within 1.5 m of the client, or in the same room as the client. **Non-personal** is other forms of care like cleaning, cooking or gardening that happens away from the client.

Scenario		Hand hygiene 	Surgical mask 	Gloves 	Eye protection 	Fluid resistant gown or plastic apron 
The client is well and has not had suspected exposure to coronavirus		✓	✗*	?	✗	?
The client is well, but is in quarantine due to potential exposure to coronavirus		✓	✓	✓	✗	?
The client has symptoms of coronavirus or a confirmed case of coronavirus	Non-personal care	✓	✓	✓	?	?
	Personal care*	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
✓ Required      ✗ Not required      ? Required if contact with bodily fluids may occur						

\* Please note in August 2020 disability care providers, home care providers and residential aged care providers have been directed to wear a facemask, even when the client is well and has not had suspected exposure to coronavirus.

# Appendix C: Resources list

## Carer Gateway

[www.carergateway.gov.au](http://www.carergateway.gov.au)

Tel: 1800 422 737 weekdays 8am till 5pm

Carer Gateway is a national support service funded by the Australian Government. It offers tailored supports and services to help you manage challenges, reduce stress and plan ahead.

- Carer Support planning
- In-Person Peer Support
- In-Person Counselling
- Emergency Respite Care
- Carer Directed Support
- Phone Counselling and online forums
- Information, resources and skills courses.

## Carers NSW

[www.carersnsw.org.au](http://www.carersnsw.org.au)

Tel: 02 9280 4744 weekdays 9am till 5pm

Carers NSW is the peak non-government organisation for carers in NSW. Carers NSW provides information, resources, education, training and support to improve the lives of carers.

- Carers NSW website includes the latest information on COVID-19 for carers.
- COVID-19 fact sheets have been created for young carers, carers of older people, people with disability, people with mental health concerns, people who are palliative and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- Carer Hangout is a safe place for carers to come together and chat to others during this period of social isolation running Fridays from 10.00am 12.00pm

## Australian Government

[www.australia.gov.au](http://www.australia.gov.au)

The latest official COVID-19 news, updates and advice from the Australian Government including financial advice, health alerts and the COVIDsafe app.

## NSW Government

[www.nsw.gov.au/COVID-19](http://www.nsw.gov.au/COVID-19)

The latest official COVID-19 news, updates and advice from the NSW Government including what you can and can't do, cases, hotspots, getting tested, emotional support, employment and financial support.

## NSW Health

[www.health.nsw.gov.au](http://www.health.nsw.gov.au)

For information about the latest health alerts, clinics and local hospitals for patients and the public. Health alerts and advice, what to do if you are feeling unwell, restrictions and safety advice.

## NSW Department of Communities and Justice

[www.coronavirus.dcj.nsw.gov.au/services/seniors-and-people-with-disability-and-carers](http://www.coronavirus.dcj.nsw.gov.au/services/seniors-and-people-with-disability-and-carers)

Useful information and links for older people, people with disability and their carers.

## Coronavirus Mental Wellbeing Service

[www.coronavirus.beyondblue.org.au/](http://www.coronavirus.beyondblue.org.au/)

Information, advice and strategies to help you manage your wellbeing and mental health

## National Home Doctor Service

[www.homedoctor.com.au](http://www.homedoctor.com.au)

Tel: 13 SICK (74 25)

To request an after-hours, bulk billed, GP home visit. Booking lines open from 6pm weekdays and all day Saturday, Sunday and public holidays.

## healthdirect

[www.healthdirect.gov.au](http://www.healthdirect.gov.au)

Tel: 1300 022 222

healthdirect free helpline is run by registered nurses who are available 24/7 to provide:

- advice when you're not sure what to do
- a COVID-19 symptom checker and restriction checker
- advice when you're not sure what to do
- whether to see your local GP, an after-hours GP or go to an emergency department
- information on where to go to get help in your area

## Mental health 24 hour emergency support

- Beyond Blue 1300 22 4636  
[www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au)
- Kids Helpline 1800 551 800  
[www.kidshelpline.com.au](http://www.kidshelpline.com.au)
- Lifeline 13 11 14  
[www.lifeline.org.au](http://www.lifeline.org.au)
- Mensline 1300 789 978  
[www.mensline.org.au](http://www.mensline.org.au)
- NSW Mental Health Line 1800 011 511

## My Aged Care

[www.myagedcare.gov.au](http://www.myagedcare.gov.au)

Tel: 1800 200 422 weekdays 8am till 8pm, Sat 10am till 2pm

My Aged Care is a national support service for older people. My Aged Care offers a range of tailored supports and services to help older Australians maintain their quality of life as they get older.

## NDIS

[www.ndis.gov.au](http://www.ndis.gov.au)

Tel: 1800 800 110 weekdays 8am till 8pm

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) provides support to people with disability, their families and carers.

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THAT VALUES AND  
SUPPORTS ALL  
CARERS**

