

This fact sheet provides information and advice for family and friend carers providing care to an older person during the winter months

Ongoing COVID-19 transmission in the community, increased transmission of influenza and the 'common cold' (rhinovirus), in combination with reduced social distancing measures and pressure on the health system can create increased risks for people who are ageing and their carers in the winter months. However, despite increased risks it is crucial to maintain connection to the community and services to support health and wellbeing. Planning ahead and continuing to implement safety measures will help to reduce risk, and help carers and those they care for to feel safe and prepared.

Planning ahead

Having conversations early with friends, family, neighbours, services and medical professionals about strategies to reduce risks will help increase comfort in accessing the community and in-home services. It is also useful to plan alternative care arrangements if COVID-19 infection impacts your usual care arrangements.

If self-isolation is needed due to COVID-19 exposure or infection, Carers NSW has developed resources to support carers. This includes the [Managing COVID-19 at home: A guide for family and friend carers](#), the [Preparing for self-isolation: a checklist for carers](#), and the [Alternative care arrangements during COVID-19](#) factsheets. More resources are available through the Carers NSW [resource webpage](#).

Specific support for managing COVID-19 at home is available through the NSW Health COVID-19 Care at Home Support Line on [1800 960 933](tel:1800960933), or through telehealth with your GP. It is important to seek help early if symptoms change from mild to worse.

Staying safe

While most public health orders have been reduced, continuing to socially distance, wearing masks and practicing good hygiene is important for reducing ongoing risks.

Keeping up to date

[NSW Health](#) regularly publishes updated information and factsheets on managing COVID-19, treatment and restrictions. Carers can also stay updated through the Carers NSW [news page](#) and [Facebook page](#).

Vaccination

With the changing weather it is important to protect against respiratory illness including COVID-19 and influenza. COVID-19 vaccination is free, and reduces transmission and the health impact of COVID-19. Influenza vaccination may also be free for vulnerable persons, it is best to speak to your treating health professional about if this is available for you or the person you care for. Staying up to date with recommended initial and additional doses will help maintain a high level of protection against respiratory illness.

The Australian Government has provided information about each [COVID-19 vaccine](#), including information translated into different [languages](#) and [information for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people](#). Vaccinations can be booked on the [COVID-19 Vaccine Clinic Finder](#), texting 'Hey Eva' to [0481 611 382](tel:0481611382), Carer Gateway can provide support on [1800 422 737](tel:1800422737). Multilingual help is available on [131 450](tel:131450) and Disability Gateway can provide accessible vaccination clinic information on [1800 643 787](tel:1800643787).

Essentials for COVID safe care



Accessing services

Accessing aged care services in the home, community and residential settings can be daunting when there are ongoing risks in the community. However, it may be important for you and the person you care for to continue or re-initiate formal services to enable you to keep caring.

Services in the home and community

The [NSW Government](#) requires that staff of home and community aged care services are vaccinated, complete regular Rapid Antigen Test (RAT) testing, and self-isolate if experiencing COVID-19 symptoms. In combination with mask use and regular hand sanitation by staff, these measures can reduce risks associated with service provision.

Residential aged care

When visiting residential aged care facilities (RACF), you may need to provide proof of vaccination and a negative Rapid Antigen Test (RAT) taken within 24 hours of your visit. It is important to wear a mask during visits and continue practicing good hygiene, especially in common areas. Unvaccinated visitors may be able to visit a RACF to visit a resident who is at the end of life, more information is available at [NSW Health](#). If you are being prevented from accessing a RACF, especially for essential care, you can talk with staff at the RACF about access options.

Having difficulties with your services or supports

If you have concerns about your service provider or difficulty accessing a residential aged care facility, you can contact the [Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission](#) on 1800 951 822 or the [Older Persons Advocacy Network](#) (OPAN) for further advice and support by calling [1800 700 600](#).

Key contacts

COVID-19 support

- Emergency: 000
- NSW Health COVID Care at Home Support Line: 1800 960 933

Carer support

- Carer Gateway: 1800 422 737
- Carers NSW: 9280 4744
- Older Persons Advocacy Network (OPAN): 1800 700 600

Mental wellbeing

- Crisis support: Lifeline: 13 11 14
- Social connection: Friendline: 1800 424 287

Looking after yourself

Continuing to manage ongoing risks in the winter months is different for everyone, and everyone has a different. It is important to take steps to look after your health and wellbeing.

Self-care

The goal of self-care is to realign with one's own needs and find space for recuperation. This includes maintaining good health and accessing health services, either through telehealth or face-to-face. Sometimes self-care is engaging in exercise, other times it is time spent with friends, or doing a solo or group hobby. Creating a list of self-care activities can make it easier to take opportunities for self-care when they arise. The Carers NSW factsheet [tips for carers of older people](#) has some great suggestions to support carers in staying well while caring in COVID-19.

Support and connection

Your wellbeing is incredibly important, as it is key to enabling continued caring. It is important to remain in contact with friends, family and the person you care for about how you are feeling, how you can support each other to feel safe, and to maintain social connection.

[Carer Gateway](#) provides localised and free support for family and friend carers. Carers can call Carer Gateway on [1800 422 737](#) Monday to Friday 8am-5pm to access counselling, coaching, peer support and carer directed packages.

Carers can also participate in free [education and wellbeing workshops](#) run by Carers NSW aimed at building carer skills and confidence navigating caring and wellbeing.