

Preparing for Winter 2026

Information for aged care providers

The 2026 winter season is approaching, with respiratory illness activity expected to rise in the coming months. Influenza (flu), COVID-19 and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), are common respiratory illnesses that typically increase in winter.

Adults aged 65 and over are at greater risk of complications from respiratory infections and may experience severe illness requiring hospitalisation.

Preparing for winter

Resources



Aged care providers should review the [NSW Respiratory Report](#). The report provides information on the levels of COVID-19, influenza and RSV circulating throughout NSW.

Staff and visitors are recommended to wear masks in residential aged care homes (RACH) when there are:

- **high** levels of RSV, influenza or COVID-19
- **moderate** levels of COVID-19
- **moderate** levels of both influenza and RSV.

RACHs and home care providers are encouraged to use public health measures informed by internal risk assessments. Further advice on risk assessments and public health measures can be found at:

- [Public health advice to residential aged care homes](#)
- [Respiratory infection advice to home care service providers](#).

Aged care providers should refer to the [Guidance for Residential Aged Care Facilities on the Public Health Management of Acute Respiratory Infections](#) for advice on outbreak response protocols, including developing preparedness plans for timely responses to acute respiratory infections.

NSW Health [Influenza resources](#), including a [poster for aged care visitors](#), are available and free to order through the [Respiratory illness resources order form](#).

Antivirals



Remind GPs to update or complete the following forms so residents can access antivirals as soon as they are diagnosed with COVID-19 or influenza.

- **For aged care home residents:** [Pre-assessment action plan for respiratory infections in aged care facility residents](#)
- **For people receiving home care:** [Pre-assessment action plan for respiratory infections](#)

Early treatment reduces the severity of disease and reduces spread among residents and staff

Ordering antivirals

Influenza antivirals: RACHs can order up to 250 doses of oseltamivir (Tamiflu®) from the State Vaccine Centre by completing the [online antiviral treatment access form](#). For orders above 250 doses, please contact your local Public Health Unit on 1300 066 055. This service is not available to home care providers. The pre-placed Tamiflu can only be used for residents of aged care facilities following prescription by an authorised prescriber.

COVID-19 antivirals: Paxlovid™ and Molnupiravir® are available to people at higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19. PBS-subsidised COVID-19 antivirals can be prescribed by authorised GPs and nurse practitioners to adults aged 70 years and older. People aged under 70 years require other [eligibility criteria](#) to access COVID-19 antivirals.

Refer to the [Guidance on use of antivirals in residential aged care facilities](#) for more information.



Infection Prevention and Control (IPC)



Under the updated Aged Care Quality Standards, providers must implement [infection prevention and control \(IPC\) measures](#) and appoint an IPC Lead. The IPC lead needs to be a nurse who has completed, or is in the process of completing, specialist IPC training.

Home care providers should look for ways to appoint a worker or team to oversee their IPC program. All staff are recommended to complete [IPC training](#).

Please see the [Aged Care Infection Prevention and Control Guide](#) for guidance on responsibilities and requirements.



Vaccination



Vaccination remains the best protection for residents against serious illness and hospitalisation. Aged care providers must provide access to the following vaccinations for their residents in accordance with the eligibility under federally funded programs:

- COVID-19
- Influenza
- Shingles
- Pneumococcal.

COVID-19, influenza, shingles and pneumococcal vaccines are free and can be administered at the same time.

The RSV vaccine is recommended for all adults aged 75 years and older, Aboriginal people aged 60 to 74 years and people with medical risk factors for severe RSV disease aged 60 years and over.

Informed consent is required (verbal or written) before administering any vaccine. Aged care providers are strongly encouraged to discuss the benefits of vaccination with residents and their next of kin.

It is recommended that aged care providers collect and track information on resident and staff vaccination status ahead of the winter season. Facility and clinical managers can access the Australian Immunisation Register (AIR) by following these [instructions](#).

Please refer to the [NSW Health Adult Vaccinations fact sheet](#) for advice on recommended age groups, intervals and doses for vaccines.

All aged care providers should ensure staff are up to date with their vaccinations, including offering free influenza vaccines annually.

Refer to the [Public health advice to residential aged care homes webpage](#) for advice on cold chain management, ordering vaccines, managing vaccine incidents and finding vaccine providers.



Information for visitors



Visitors are essential for resident wellbeing by reducing social isolation. Strategies RACHs can use to reduce the spread of respiratory infections from visitors to residents include:

- informing visitors not to enter RACHs if they have respiratory symptoms
- offering a RAT to visitors at reception
- encouraging visits to be held outdoors or in well-ventilated areas away from other residents
- encouraging visitors to receive an annual influenza vaccine and stay up to date with COVID-19 vaccines
- Practising good general hygiene, including regular handwashing.

Visits can continue even if there are cases of acute respiratory infections (ARIs) in the RACH. Family and friends with cold or flu symptoms should avoid visiting the RACH. For compassionate reasons (including visiting persons undergoing end-of-life care), people with symptoms may attend if they:

- Wear a mask
- Meet outdoors where possible.

More information and resources:

- [Winter Respiratory Vaccination Toolkit](#)
- [Influenza Vaccination Program: for immunisation providers](#)
- [SKAI for health professionals – empowering immunisation conversations](#)

