

Illawarra Diggers Family and Visitor COVID-19 Update

Friday 24 December 2021

Dear Family Members and Visitors

RE:

23rd December 2021 Changes to Resident and Visitor Restrictions in NSW Residential Aged Care;

I did not expect to have to be writing to you all again on Christmas Eve but, in response to the rising case numbers in NSW, NSW Health have issued updated advice yesterday afternoon which needs to be communicated and understood for the sake of our residents, staff and visitors.

1. Resident and Visitor Restrictions

The NSW government issued new easing of restrictions on 15 December for many venues. In the light of significant increases in case numbers, you will all be aware that the NSW Government, along with Victoria and other states, have quickly reintroduced measures to reduce infections. The most obvious of these measures – mask wearing indoors and QR codes – have remained in Residential Aged Care consistently so we will carry on as before.

Very frustrating for us all, yesterday's announcement has changes to the advice in regard to visitor outings and in regard to Rapid Antigen Testing (RAT) in aged care which comes at a time when the government stores are on holidays, supplies are restricted to only outbreak sites and area health services are stepping back from active outbreak management.

The following is the latest advice we have:

Residents

- Residents are permitted to leave the facility and attend small family gatherings or for other reasons but must abide by the current Public Health (COVID-19 General) Order (No 2) 2021.
- Residents who leave the facility to attend a family gathering should on return have a RAT on days 2, 4 and 7 after they return. If well, residents do not need to isolate. If they develop any signs or symptoms of COVID-19 they should immediately be isolated and have a PCR test.

- Ensure residents are guided about COVID-safe behaviours, including practicing physical distancing (1.5m) and hand hygiene,
- the event complies with the current Public Health (COVID-19 General) Order 2021
- no one at the event:
 - has been a close contact of a person with confirmed COVID-19 in the last 14 days
 - lives in a household with a person who is currently self-isolating
 - is waiting for a COVID-19 test result.

Visitors

Residents are permitted to have two fully vaccinated visitors aged 12 years and over, plus two children aged under 12 years per day:

- Visitors aged 12 years and over must have received a second dose of a COVID vaccination at least 14 days prior to their visit.
- **Visitors are strongly encouraged to get a booster vaccine if they are eligible for one, and to have a negative Rapid Antigen Testing (RAT) prior to entry**
- Up to 2 children under 12 years are permitted to visit provided they are accompanied by a fully vaccinated person.
- Babies and toddlers under 3 years of age should not wear a mask as it is a choking hazard.
- Wherever possible, the visit should be in an outdoor area. Visits should not be in any inside communal areas. **All visitors must wear a surgical mask over their nose and mouth while visiting indoors.**
- Aged care providers should continue to ensure residents are able to receive visitors. However after a risk assessment, providers may choose to limit visitors to one visitor per day per resident and no children under twelve when COVID-19 is circulating in the local community. In these instances, providers should continue to support other social contact methods such as video and telephone calls to ensure residents remain connected with their family and friends. **[Note: Illawarra Diggers will continue to operate on the 2 visitor cap at present but will continue to monitor our situation]**
- Existing requirements in the Public Health (COVID-19 Care Services) Order 2021 on visiting residents who are at end of life remain in place.

Palliative and End of Life Care

- The Minister has made exemption to the 2 person per day restriction to allow additional visitors for end of life residents subject to:
 - No more than 4 people, including children, to visit at any one time;
 - All visitors 12 years and over must wear a mask while in the facility but may remove the mask while directly interacting with the resident;
 - There being minimal interaction between the visitors and the staff and other residents.

Visitors must not enter the home if they:

- have [COVID-19 symptoms](#)
- are a close or casual contact of a person with confirmed COVID-19 unless they have completed their self-isolation and testing requirements. Close contacts should not enter high risk settings for at least 14 days since their exposure to a COVID-positive person.
- are waiting for a COVID-19 test result.
- have been overseas in the previous 14 days, unless they are:
 - fully vaccinated and have received a negative PCR test 7 days or later after arrival in NSW

Visitors will still be required to undergo the screening process as before and will need to provide evidence of their vaccinations. Staff will need to sight the COVID certificate which includes the vaccination dates (these are included on the Australian Government COVID-19 Certificate). If possible, visitors are asked to provide a printed copy of the vaccination certificate for the resident's file.

As visitors will continue to need to be screened prior to entry, visitors are requested to ring ahead and arrange a time so that we can smooth the process in the foyer. If you do not ring ahead then you may be required to wait outside until you can be accommodated.

For this reason, visitor entry will still be restricted to between 8.30am and 4pm Monday to Sunday however once inside, visitors may stay as long as they want.

Access To and From Illawarra Diggers

Please be reminded that access **To** and **From** our home is strictly via the Main Entrance. This has not changed.

You will also need to continue to use the NSW QR Code and show proof of using code on the NSW COVID App or sign in in the register. Only the main entrance has the provision for screening and signing in and out. This is still a strict requirement imposed on residential aged care homes by NSW Health.

Some family members are exiting the home via the Woonona Door or the bottom car park lift. They have been observed by staff and also on CCTV. This means they are not signing out. Please assist us to maintain control of our home for the sake of our residents and other families. Please do the right thing as these rules are only put in place for the safety of our residents.

2. Rapid Antigen Tests

There are essentially two main types of Rapid Antigen Test (RAT) – those that can be self-administered and those that need to be administered by clinical personnel.

The clinically administered kits are distributed free to residential aged care facilities but the government requires a significant commitment in time and cost to test every staff and visitor every time they enter the home. This program was trialled in high risk local health districts in the last month or so but we have not been part of that trial.

The self-administered kits are also available to use and have to be purchased directly by us. These prices have come down but generally the kits cost between \$8 and \$10 per single use kit. We have purchased a number of these kits to use for residents where we believe there is a risk and we wish to screen them ahead of a potential PCR (lab) test.

A number of homes are using RAT kits to screen every visitor and charging \$10 per visitor to recoup the basic cost. Illawarra Diggers will have to also consider this option if the use of the RAT kit becomes mandatory for visitors. We do not currently have access to enough stock to be able to implement this though.

As in the advice above regarding resident visitors and outings, NSW Health are now advising all visitors to aged care homes and those taking residents out, to strongly consider having a Rapid Antigen Test to ensure the safety of our vulnerable older community and the staff who support them.

We do not like isolating residents on return while they await a PCR test any more than the residents like being isolated. However, this may be a strategy we need to implement on occasion depending on the identified risks and the resident's health.

3. General

This is an ever changing and complex scenario. It is very confusing and stressful for the general public, especially over this Christmas period. But it is also very confusing and stressful for our staff as well. The rules are constantly changing and front desk, lifestyle and care staff are being confronted by sometimes stressed and upset families asking specific questions regarding their family members.

Please have patience and understanding with our staff. Their absolute primary goal is the health and wellbeing of our residents. They are being updated on information but are also being asked to refer issues to either Chloe or myself to ensure a consistent response in line with the latest Health advice.

We will all continue to work collectively for the good of our residents as we have done in the past.

If you have any requests or suggestions relating to your family member during these easing visiting periods please contact our Lifestyle Team on their general email address at lifestyle@illawaradiggers.com.au;

If you have any questions relating to this advice, or for administrative issues relating to appointments or other matters, please contact admin@illawarradiggers.com.au or call on 02 4225 4700.

As previously advised, if you wish to **deliver anything** to your family, you will need to do so in office hours, **Monday to Sunday 8.30am to 4.30pm**. The office staff or Weekend Coordinator will accept the delivery and ensure it gets to your family member.

Please do not visit or deliver anything outside of these times as the admin office is not attended and care staff may be taken away from attending to residents to answer the door or they may not attend the front door if they are busy.

Should you require further information regarding COVID-19, please refer to the Commonwealth Department of Health website:

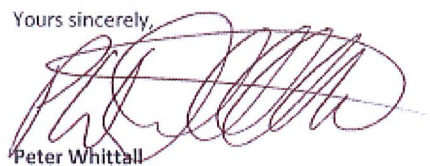
<https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert>

and the NSW Health website which gives information specific to residential care in NSW:

<https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/covid-19/Pages/racf-latest-advice.aspx>

We will continue to update our procedures and protocols in line with government guidelines and to communicate with our residents and our families and Illawarra Diggers community.

Yours sincerely,



Peter Whittall
CEO