

Illawarra Diggers COVID-19 UPDATE: 27 April 2020 - Letter to Families and Visitors

Ongoing Quarantine and Flu Injection Update

Monday 27 April 2020

Dear Family Member and Visitors to Illawarra Diggers

Firstly I would like to thank all of you, our families and resident representatives for the support of our efforts to keep our residents safe and healthy during this pandemic. I am very pleased to say that we have not received any negative feedback nor criticism, despite this situation putting significant stress on everyone.

We have worked hard to ensure residents can communicate with their family and friends and where appropriate, to allow visitors to specific palliative residents and some residents suffering dementia based on the needs of the resident.

We have also been holding regular resident meetings. While the inevitable question of "how much longer" is always voiced, our residents are very understanding of the measures being taken and appreciative of the work of the staff caring for them.

There has been some media reporting of PM Scott Morrison's comments last week regarding opening up residential care to visitors as residents were being locked in their rooms and being denied any social outlet, which is detrimental to their wellbeing. On Friday night I was on a zoom meeting with Chief Medical Officer Brendan Murphy, Minister for Aged Care Senator the Hon. Richard Colbeck and 750 CEO's and executives of aged care organisations across Australia.

The overwhelming sentiment from all providers was to protect our residents and the broader aged population, and most reported similar support from their residents and families for the unprecedented measures needing to be taken to provide that protection. The forum felt the comments by the PM and subsequently by the Minister were disappointing as they did not show support for the work being done for the residential care population in Australia and that opening up homes to visitors at this stage would significantly increase the risk of infection and potential outbreak occurring.

We have two good examples in Sydney where once an outbreak occurs, infections continue for weeks and potentially months after the first case is reported, despite lock down procedures and infection control.

Following the meeting on Friday, Illawarra Diggers has reviewed our current policy on visitors and do not believe there is a need to change our level of restriction. The following details the current strategy:

ILLAWARRA DIGGERS AGED AND COMMUNITY CARE LTD ABN 22 138 528 953

8 Blundell Parade, Corrimal NSW 2518 P.O. Box 204 Corrimal NSW 2518

Telephone. **(02) 4225 4700** Facsimile. (02) 4225 4750

Email. admin@illawarradiggers.com.au Web. www.illawarradiggers.com.au

1. Restricted Quarantine Access to Illawarra Diggers Ongoing

1. All external access doors locked 24 hours to prevent unauthorised entry;
2. Access via the front door, only to the reception desk, between 9am and 4.30pm. To gain access please press the intercom button to the left of the front door to speak with staff;
 - o Visitors are reminded and requested not to arrange for family members to meet them at other entries as we are unable to monitor these points and this may expose all residents to unnecessary risk;
3. Visitors who wish to meet with residents are requested to first ring the office and arrange a suitable time and day rather than just turn up. Staff need to be available to undertake screening of the visitors and also we do not want multiple families in the visiting area at the same time. This also applies to weekends. Please ring during weekday office hours and the name and time will be given to the Weekend Coordinator to ensure that visitors are not delayed unnecessarily.
4. Visitors for palliative residents and some residents suffering advanced dementia may call reception to arrange for appropriate access to support their family member;
5. Any authorised visitor or tradesperson is required, upon entry, to sanitise their hands, put on a face mask and then speak with the reception staff who will require the tradesperson/visitor to fill in a questionnaire and be temperature checked before entering the home.

Our reception staff are authorised to refuse entry to any person if they deem them to be an infection risk based on the pre-entry criteria.

All measures are in place for the safety and wellbeing of our residents, your family members. The residents and staff all really appreciate your support in complying with these restrictions for the time being.

2. Flu Vaccines and Access to Residential Aged Care Facilities

Since my last correspondence of 2 April, we have undertaken several clinics to provide vaccination to all residents and staff. We have had almost 100% vaccination of residents and will shortly have all staff vaccinated.

The NSW legislation requiring vaccination of all people entering an aged care facility. The original comments by the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee indicated that restrictions should be placed on those who have not been vaccinated against influenza after 1 May 2020 but subsequent state legislation did not have a May start date and therefore compliance was implied from 27 March when the legislation was passed.

Many homes are struggling to access vaccines for their staff but we were fortunate to have secured ours early and therefore all staff have access to be vaccinated. We have maintained 1 May as the cut-off date and, with some specific exemptions, staff will be required to provide evidence of vaccination by 1 May or they will be unable to attend work.

Also from 1 May, all visitors and trades will be required to provide evidence of vaccination for the 2020 flu season, otherwise they will not be allowed to access the home, regardless of the reason.

The government has set significant fines for allowing unvaccinated people into the aged care home and Illawarra Diggers are legally obligated to enforce the legislation.

So please bring your vaccination record from your doctor or pharmacist; or an immunisation history statement from Medicare online or the Express Plus Medicare mobile app so they we can record it in our database of vaccinated staff and visitors. Please understand that, from 1 May, if you are unable to provide evidence of vaccination you will not be allowed to enter the home.

3. Connecting with Residents

We have had a great success with email and Face Time and the occasional zoom connection between our residents and their families and friends.

The email to arrange this or to leave a message for one of our residents is lifestyle@illawarradiggers.com.au .

If you want your family member to have internet access themselves for their own device or a phone in their room, please contact our admin office.

Please be aware that we are restricting our support to Face Time and Zoom. While there are other products on the market our staff are not IT experts and do their very best to provide access for families. We have had requests from families for less mainstream software programs that do not work well here and we have little capacity to troubleshoot on the resident's behalf. Our IT support are currently only remote and are not attending our home either. Please be flexible as we support the residents in accessing the technology.


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>

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.

As always, Illawarra Diggers will continue comply with all government directives and to make informed conservative decisions to ensure the best outcome for our residents and staff.

Yours sincerely,



Peter Whittall
CEO
Illawarra Diggers Aged and Community Care