

Aged residential care & closed facilities guidance

Context

The purpose of testing in these settings is to: keep residents safe and connected to family and whānau, to keep facilities operating by enabling care workers to return to work, and to prevent or minimise the spread of COVID-19 in the facility.

Closed facilities (increased risk of viral amplification)

For the purpose of this document and [the Testing Plan](#) a closed facility is defined as a facility where people reside under care 24 hours a day, and there is an increased risk of viral amplification due to residing/living near to each other. As these individuals are residing in these facilities under the direction of the government or a health funder there is an additional obligation to provide a low- risk environment.

There is an over representation of our priority and/or vulnerable populations residing within different closed facilities within Aotearoa New Zealand.

Included in these settings are:

- aged residential care (ARC) and hospice
- correctional and youth justice facilities; and
- community residential care residences.

Measures and testing

The most important protective measures against COVID-19 and other respiratory pathogens in the workplace is to ensure employees are supported to stay home when they have onset of respiratory symptoms, that there is encouragement of mask wearing when individuals are working in close contact with others who may spread the virus, and that good hygiene practices are promoted.

Public health led guidance should be followed for those who have symptoms compatible with COVID-19 or are a contact of a confirmed case.

Advice for preventing and managing facility transmission and outbreaks

Due to a high proportion of vulnerable people residing in these facilities, additional measures may be required to support clinical and public health management.

Symptomatic testing

When testing symptomatic residents, a prompt diagnosis of COVID-19 is important for those who are eligible for, and may benefit from, administration of oral antivirals.

Consideration can be given to confirming a positive RAT result with a PCR test for the first few cases in a facility (to confirm presence of the outbreak).

Asymptomatic screening testing

Residents are considered close household contacts if they share the same areas (dining, living, and activity rooms) with a known contact.

If there is ongoing facility transmission, it is recommended to conduct a **RAT** on asymptomatic residents every **48 hours for seven days after the last case**, for early detection of cases and reduction of transmission.

Managing Isolation of positive residents

COVID-19 positive cases need to be isolated for at least seven days from the onset of symptoms or from the day of a positive test result if symptoms have resolved. Decisions regarding isolation need to balance with residents' wellbeing and managing the risk of transmission.

While isolation must be within the facility, positive cases do not necessarily need to be confined to their rooms. For example, if it is feasible, it may be preferable to group positive cases, allowing them contact with each other.

It is important to note that some cases may continue to have some symptoms and remain infectious beyond Day Seven. Therefore, it is recommended that they stay isolated until 24 hours after acute symptoms resolve, but not longer than ten days (unless significantly immunocompromised).

After seven-to-ten days, infectivity risk from symptomatically recovered positive cases is substantially reduced. A risk assessment to inform easing of restrictions and release decisions can include the severity of illness and its impacts on other residents, especially those who have interacted with COVID-19-positive people.

Residents who have interacted with COVID-19-positive people

For those with less and short-lived contact, exposed residents do not require isolation. Continue to monitor for symptoms for seven days from the time of exposure, and conduct a RAT immediately if symptoms develop.

Testing modality choices for closed Facilities

Target group		Low transmission (no surge) ¹	Medium transmission (escalating or de-escalating) ²	High transmission (surge) ³
Closed facilities: ARC Corrections Community Residential Care	Symptomatic ⁴ residents	Rapid PCR where available RAT to inform immediate clinical care	Rapid PCR for those with compatible respiratory illnesses RAT to inform immediate clinical care	RAT to inform clinical and public health management decisions Rapid PCR for priority and vulnerable population groups Consider a PCR for first few cases to confirm presence of outbreak
	Symptomatic staff	As per Health Care Workers guidance		
	Symptomatic visitors	Should not visit facilities with residents from priority and vulnerable population groups		
	Asymptomatic screening test: residents	Not recommended unless for public health purposes or close household-like contacts	RAT for new residents on arrival	RAT for screening of patients/residents <i>For example: RAT every 48 hours, for seven days after the last case</i>
	Asymptomatic screening test: staff	Not recommended unless for public health purposes or close household-like contacts Additional precautions beyond Day 5 may be advised for staff who were household contacts, and who work with vulnerable patients/clients		Daily RAT for staff to work
	Asymptomatic screening test: visitors	Not recommended unless for public health purposes or close household-like contacts		RAT for visitors before the visit every day

¹ Low transmission (no surge): low-grade community transmission where testing collection/distribution and laboratory testing capacity are meeting testing demand, with a low level of demand on the health system and other sectors.

² Medium transmission (escalating or de-escalating): medium transmission where case numbers (based on surveillance data, circulating variants and/or modelling) are escalating and de-escalating between high and low transmission scenarios, with evident demand increase in testing services and availability of resources compared to the low-transmission scenario.

³ High transmission (surge): widespread community transmission where testing demand ranges from placing a burden on, to exceeding, testing collection/distribution and laboratory testing capacity, with a high-level burden on the health system and other sectors.

⁴ If RAT result is negative but still symptomatic a rapid PCR test is recommended. If rapid PCR test is not available, repeat RAT.

Testing healthcare and correction workers

It is essential that the workforce is maintained at the level adequate for ensuring ongoing care of all people. If workforce is significantly negatively impacted by COVID-19, service providers may undertake risk assessments to ensure safety of residents and workforce.

Specific guidance has been established for workers, with the following general advice:

- Staff who are/were household contacts and/or who work with vulnerable patients/clients may be able to return to work with asymptomatic screening testing
- Additional precautions beyond the general public guidance to test daily for five days from the day when the household case tests positive may be advised for staff who were household contacts and who work with vulnerable patients/clients as per [Healthcare Worker Guidance](#); and
- **High transmission:** daily RAT asymptomatic screening of staff is recommended during high community transmission (surge) or facility transmission.

Visitors to healthcare facilities

Symptomatic visitors should avoid visiting healthcare facilities while unwell.

When assessing asymptomatic screening of visitors, the recommendations are:

- visitors who have recently been a case/household contact should avoid visiting a facility for ten days from the onset of the contact's symptoms (or date of positive test if asymptomatic); and
- during the period of high transmission (surge), visitors should undertake a self-test RAT before entry (at home before arrival or on site).

A facility/service risk assessment should undertake its own risk assessment for supporting patients in having whānau/visitors if safe to do so.