

Provider Alert

NDIS Quality & Safeguards Commission

24 March 2020

Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Information for support workers and access to PPE

The following information has been cleared by the Australian Government Department of Health.

- People who have returned from anywhere overseas, or have been in close contact with someone confirmed to have COVID-19, must self-isolate for 14 days.
- If you develop symptoms, including a fever and cough, immediately and urgently seek medical attention.
- This information sheet should be read in conjunction with the 'What you need to know' and 'Isolation guidance' information sheets on the [Australian Government Department of Health](#) website.

Can I go to work?

Like others, people working in the disability services sector need to stay at home for 14 days after returning from overseas or being in close contact with someone confirmed to have COVID-19. Employees who are in isolation cannot go to work and should alert their employer. Depending on the type of work, and provided the employee is well, they may want to discuss alternative arrangements such as working from home. See the 'Isolation guidance' information sheets on the [Department of Health](#) website.

Disability support workers should not attend work if they have a fever, or symptoms of a respiratory illness.

What should I tell my staff?

Employers should provide information to all employees and contract staff on relevant information and procedures to prevent the spread of coronavirus. Employers should inform staff who meet the above criteria that they should remain isolated in their home.

Employees should advise their employer if they develop symptoms during the isolation period, particularly if they have been in the workplace or in contact with a client. Public health authorities may contact employers in the event an employee is confirmed to have coronavirus.

NDIS providers can find information about coronavirus, including provider obligations, how to reduce the risk to participants, and links to updates and resources on the [NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission](#) website.

Is training available?

The Australian Government Department of Health has developed a free online training module: [Infection prevention and control for COVID-19](#).

This training module is for all support workers, including those in disability and aged care. It covers the fundamentals of infection prevention and control for COVID-19, including

- COVID-19 - what is it?
- Signs and symptoms
- Keeping safe - protecting participants and your workforce
- Myth busting

At the end of this module, you should be able to:

- understand the basics about the COVID-19 virus, including how it is spread
- describe what you can do to protect participants and your workforce
- know what to do if you develop symptoms
- know what to do if the person you are supporting develops symptoms
- tell the difference between myths and facts of COVID-19.

If you have any technical questions relating to the training portal, please email support@covid-19training.gov.au

The Department of Health has also developed a [webinar on COVID-19 preparedness for in-home and community aged care](#). This webinar is also relevant to all providers and workers in the disability sector.

Should disability support workers wear Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)?

If you are working with people with disability, continue to practise good hygiene - wearing gloves where required, washing your hands frequently and so on.

There is no need for disability or health workers to wear surgical masks unless you are working directly with clients or patients who are exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19. Further guidance on the use of surgical masks is on the [Department of Health](#) website.

How can providers access PPE?

The Australian Government Department of Health provides the following advice for providers to access PPE.

If a case of COVID-19 is suspected by a medical professional, workers will need to practise further infection control measures including use of appropriate PPE.

In the context of NDIS supports and services, where a case of COVID-19 is suspected by a medical professional, PPE may be required in settings where:

- supports being provided are essential to the participant's life, health or safety due to withdrawal or alteration of critical supports
- contact between people exceeds Department of Health guidelines for social distancing or isolation
- there are heightened risks to people with disability due to their [vulnerabilities](#).

These situations may arise in supported living arrangements, or where essential supports are provided to a person in their own home.

In line with standard procedure, all requests for stock from the National Medical Stockpile should be sent to: NDISCOVIDPPE@health.gov.au

The Department of Health is triaging requests for stock from the National Medical Stockpile and is recommending deployments of protective equipment from the Stockpile according to need. Requesting parties will be asked to demonstrate that:

- they have been unable to source masks through the open market
- existing stocks have been depleted
- who the requested masks are intended for
- how the masks are to be prioritised and distributed in order to minimise transmission to greatest effect
- how previous Stockpile stocks (if applicable) have been used efficiently and effectively.

In the event of an outbreak in a supported independent living setting, NDIS providers should contact the Department to request PPE from the Stockpile immediately.

More information

For the latest advice, information and resources, go to www.health.gov.au

Call the National Coronavirus Health Information Line on 1800 020 080. It operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week. If you require translating or interpreting services, call 131 450.

The phone number of each state or territory public health agency is available at www.health.gov.au/state-territory-contacts

Information for NDIS participants and providers is available at www.ndis.gov.au and www.ndiscommission.gov.au

Links to previous COVID-19 provider alerts

- 19 March 2020: [Business continuity planning](#)
- 9 March 2020: [Provider obligations and COVID-19 health information](#)
- 7 February 2020: [Information about the novel coronavirus outbreak](#)

General Enquiries

1800 035 544 (free call from landlines)

Our contact centre is open 9am to 4.30pm in the NT
9.00am to 5.00pm in the ACT, NSW, QLD, SA, TAS and VIC. Monday to
Friday, excluding public holidays.

To provide feedback, contact the NDIS Commission by emailing
contactcentre@ndiscommission.gov.au.

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