



# Coronavirus (COVID-19): Outbreak preparedness, prevention and management

This information is intended to support registered NDIS providers to understand how to:

- ensure their workers take reasonable precautions to protect people with disability and themselves
- prepare for an outbreak of COVID-19
- respond to suspected or confirmed cases in different types of service settings
- manage an outbreak of COVID-19.

## Provider obligations

In line with your obligations under your conditions of registration, including compliance with the [NDIS Practice Standards](#) and [NDIS Code of Conduct](#), you should be planning your response to a potential outbreak of COVID-19, and taking reasonable precautions to minimise infection risks.

From 15 November 2021, there will be a new emergency and disaster management NDIS Practice Standard in effect which sets expectations on what providers should have in place to prepare, prevent, manage and respond to emergency and disaster situations. A transition period applies for existing registered NDIS providers for whom the new standard applies from 24 January 2022. More information is available on the [new NDIS Practice Standards and Quality Indicators page](#) on the NDIS Commission website.

This information provides guidance to help you meet your obligations and minimise the risk to NDIS participants' health, wellbeing and safety.

This fact sheet has been endorsed by the Australian Government Department of Health.

## Keeping the NDIS participants you support safe

All workers should take reasonable precautions to continue to provide supports and services in a safe and competent manner with care and skill and to keep themselves and others safe and **must not go to work** if they have:

- a fever, or even mild symptoms, including cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, runny nose or nasal congestion, tiredness, or loss of smell or taste ), or

- returned from overseas or interstate in the last 14 days, or as consistent with their state or territory's public health directions, or
- been in contact with someone diagnosed with COVID-19.

If a worker experiences even mild symptoms of respiratory illness (such as those outlined above), they must **report those symptoms to their place of work**. Should a worker experience any of these symptoms for the first time during a shift, they should leave work immediately, report their symptoms as identified above, and get tested for COVID-19, seek medical advice from their doctor or call the National Coronavirus Hotline on 1800 020 080.

**Once the worker has been tested for COVID-19, they should self-isolate at home until the results are received.**

If COVID-19 is excluded, the worker may be able to return to work once well and as guided by medical advice regarding the infectious period for their condition.

If a diagnosis of COVID-19 is confirmed, your state or territory's public health unit will advise the worker about what they need to do. Public health officials in each state and territory will undertake an investigation to locate any close contacts with the confirmed case to provide advice on self-quarantine and testing. This will include locating any close contacts during the 24 hours before the onset of symptoms of the case.

#### **Close contact**

'Close contact' is defined as:

- More than 15 minutes face-to-face contact in any setting with a confirmed (or probable) case in the period from 24 hours before onset of symptoms in the confirmed (or probable) case, **or**
- Sharing a closed space with a confirmed (or probable) case for a prolonged period (e.g. more than 2 hours) in the period extending from 24 hours before onset of symptoms in the confirmed (or probable) case.

## **Preparing for an outbreak of COVID-19**

### ***Update: Check local guidance about using PPE***

*As the COVID-19 pandemic continues in Australia, some states and territories have updated their advice about when you should use PPE when providing supports and services for people with disability. Please stay updated with the latest advice from your [state or territory's public health unit](#) to ensure you and your workers are complying with local guidance.*

*Please read the below information in this context.*

Community transmission of COVID-19 is occurring, so NDIS providers should plan and prepare for possible cases involving the people with disability you work with and/or your workers.

As part of [business continuity planning](#) for COVID-19, you should consider preparing an outbreak management plan that is proportionate to the risk of supports you deliver, and the size of your organisation. This plan may include the following components:

- Identify which supports are **critical for the health, wellbeing and safety of a person with disability**. Decisions on which services are continued, altered, or suspended are based on the assessed risk to the person with disability and in conjunction with [relevant state/territory public health orders](#). Read more about [making alterations to services](#).
- Identify and **assess risks** to people you support and to the organisation (such as financial, operational, workplace health and safety obligations), and implement controls to mitigate these where possible. This may include:
  - reviewing [behaviour support strategies](#) for people who are isolated and may display behaviours of concern
  - encouraging workers and people you support to have [flu vaccinations](#), and maintain up-to-date records of vaccination status
- Outline **workforce contingency plans** in the event of an outbreak, or that workers are unwell and need to self-isolate, or are not able to work because of caring responsibilities or their own health vulnerabilities.  
This may include:
  - changing leave entitlements to ensure that all workers, regardless of their employment status, can access leave to allow them to self-isolate if required. Temporary changes have been made to awards (including to the Social, Community, Home Care and Disability Services Industry Award 2010) to include a minimum entitlement to 2 weeks [unpaid pandemic leave](#)
  - maintaining an up-to-date contact list of all staff, including casual or agency staff. The National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) has links for platforms who match providers with [new or backup support workers](#)
  - streamlining the on boarding of new staff to maintain health, wellbeing and safety, and avoid risk of harm and having new workers undertake the [training for workers modules](#).
- Establish a **COVID-19 incident reporting process** as part of your organisation's incident management system, and understand your [reporting obligations to the NDIS Commission](#)
- Set up an **outbreak management team** – commensurate to the scale of your organisation or the facility. This team will be responsible for planning, coordinating, and managing logistics if an outbreak occurs, and communicating with state/territory health departments, the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission (NDIS Commission) and the NDIA (if required).
- **Update staff training** in [infection control procedures](#), including standard precautions (hand hygiene, correct use of appropriate PPE where needed (and disposal procedures), and cough and sneeze etiquette) and transmission-based precautions (contact and droplet precautions).
- Implement **standard infection control precautions** throughout all work places.
- Establish communication channels to **keep your workforce informed** of any updates or changes to your business processes as a result of the outbreak. This includes contracted or agency staff, such as cleaners.
- Document a **strategy for communicating with the people you support, their families or guardians/advocates**. This should include the different communication formats depending on communication preferences, and outline how people will be supported to understand changes to services and supports.

- Undertake a **stocktake of consumables** and source additional supplies if necessary. This could include compiling an ‘outbreak kit’ with items such as:
  - [personal protective equipment](#)
  - hand hygiene products (hand sanitiser, liquid soap)
  - cleaning supplies
  - other essential supplies such as toilet paper and food.
- Plan for increased **environmental cleaning**, including where additional cleaners and oversight is required.
- Identify any participants who have **advance care or healthcare or support plans**, and keep a copy if possible.
- Develop an **emergency plan** for the people with disability you support. This should contain details of:
  - their emergency contacts (e.g. family, guardian or advocate)
  - any medical conditions as well as ongoing treatment and current medications, including dose and frequency
  - current GP and any other health professionals
  - the advanced care or support plan (if they have one).
- If any participants are at higher risk, **prepare a hospital bag** with things they might need for an overnight stay.
- Document a **visitor management policy** in the event that there is a suspected/confirmed case or an outbreak
- Arrange for **appropriate isolation** of people who are unwell and have a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 and must be isolated, or for your workers to stay in to limit transmission risk. This may include arranging alternative accommodation for a resident who has contracted COVID-19 at their request, or where other residents are at serious risk of adverse effects from a COVID-19 infection. Alternative arrangements for accommodation should always be made in consultation with the person and ensuring that adequate supports are maintained for that person should they need to temporarily relocate.

## In-home support settings

An addition to the points above, if you provide **in-home supports** to people with disability, you should also:

- work with them to agree on **escalation processes** and communication plans if their needs change. The [COVID-19 Planning Resource for people with disability](#) will assist people with preparing this information
- consider **how you would monitor their safety** and wellbeing if they could not receive services temporarily
- make a record of participants who can **only be contacted by a face-to-face visit** (that is, if they cannot use the phone independently)
- give the participant and their family, guardian or advocate contact details of someone they can call if there is a **change to their health condition or circumstances** (such as, if they develop symptoms, are in self-isolation or have been in contact with a confirmed COVID-19 case)

## Responding to a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19

### In-home support settings

If your workers provide supports to a person living in their own home, they should monitor for symptoms of COVID-19 in the person with disability whom they support or any other family members. While a participant or other family members showing symptoms is not sufficient reason to cease providing supports to them, you and your workers should implement your outbreak management plan.

Depending on the types of supports provided, this may include:

- assisting the participant to **seek medical advice** from their doctor or call the National Coronavirus Hotline on 1800 020 080 and assisting them to undergo COVID-19 testing, if that is advised
- identifying **which supports are essential** for the participant's health, wellbeing and safety, and whether any of these supports can be provided in a different way. For example, telephone welfare checks, or purchasing medication and food and leaving it in a safe place.
- ensuring good **communication with the participant** and/or their family members and support workers so that everyone understands any disruption or alteration to supports and services
- **sourcing PPE** through usual means, and using it according to guidance from your state or territory's public health guidelines, or when:
  - a participant has or is suspected to have COVID-19
  - the supports being provided are essential to their life, health or safety
  - contact between people exceeds the Australian Government Department of Health Guidelines for social distancing and isolation.

Workers should not enter the home of a person who is unwell until either:

- their COVID-19 status is confirmed, or
- appropriate PPE is used correctly to provide any supports necessary to maintain the person's health, safety and wellbeing.

### Disability accommodation settings

We encourage providers to review [National guidelines for the prevention, control and public health management of COVID-19 outbreaks in residential settings](#) (Communicable Diseases Network Australia (CDNA)).

All workers and people with disability in the accommodation setting should actively monitor for symptoms of COVID-19.

If a participant shows symptoms of COVID-19:

- **Seek medical advice** from their doctor or call the National Coronavirus Hotline on 1800 020 080. If recommended by a medical practitioner, assist the participant to undergo COVID-19 testing.
- While awaiting the test results, **isolate the participant** and ensure they wear a face mask when in common areas. Increase routine environmental cleaning, and implement droplet precautions.

- Inform any person who **may have had close contact** with the participant from 24 hours before the onset of symptoms that there is a suspected case of COVID-19, including co-residents, families, and workers. Note: In some states and territories, this will be done by local health authorities. Check with your [state or territory's public health unit](#).
- **Keep the participant informed** and support all residents to understand any changes to supports and services that may affect them.
- **Source PPE** through usual means and use it according to guidance from your state or territory's public health guidelines, or when:
  - a participant has or is suspected to have COVID-19
  - the supports being provided are essential to the participant's life, health or safety
  - contact between people exceeds the Australian Government Department of Health Guidelines for social distancing and isolation.
- Complete an internal **incident report** for the suspected case of COVID-19 (or other reports as required according to your organisation's outbreak management plan)

If a case of **COVID-19 is confirmed** by a positive test, you should take the following steps consistent with advice from your state or territory's public health unit:

- Inform people who have been in **close contact**, who must then self-quarantine for 14 days. Note: In some states and territories, this will also be done by local health authorities. Check with your [state or territory's public health unit](#).
- Update **internal incident report** of a confirmed case (or other applicable internal reporting).
- **Notify the NDIS Commission** by completing and submitting the [COVID-19 Notification of event form](#).
- Isolate the participant until they have recovered and been cleared by a medical professional. Ideally, this would be in a single room with ensuite, if available. This may involve assisting the participant to **relocate to alternative, temporary accommodation** for this period, if they agree to do so.
- Take precautions to **limit risk of spread** such as
  - suspending non-essential visitors for 14 days
  - arranging for professional cleaning of the residence and increased frequency of cleaning and disinfection
  - where your workers work across multiple outlets, or providers, work with those workers to determine if you can provide the level of work they require within your organisation to limit them working across multiple outlets. You may be able to collaborate with other providers to achieve this outcome.

## Visitor management

Regularly review your organisation's visitor management policies to ensure they are consistent with the current public health orders in your state or territory, and reflect whether there are suspected or confirmed cases of COVID-19 within the provider setting. When doing so, seek guidance from the public health officials who are assisting with the confirmed or suspected outbreak.

This will include:

- informing all visitors about social distancing and hand hygiene

- preventing visitors who are not necessary to provide support to people in the residence from attending the facility if there is a suspected or confirmed case, and suspending all group activities (if this has not already been done)

You should communicate often with the people you support, their families and guardians/advocates about the steps you are taking to prevent infection, including any changes to the visitor management policies. Where it is possible in the context of the local health authorities' advice, and public health orders, visits by family members should be supported.

## Managing an outbreak of COVID-19

Your outbreak management plan will help your workforce identify, respond to and manage a potential COVID-19 outbreak; protect the health of all workers and residents, and reduce the severity and duration of outbreaks if they occur.

An outbreak is considered by the Australian Government Department of Health to have started when **two people in three days become sick with the symptoms AND at least one of these has a positive test for COVID-19**.

Your [state or territory's public health unit](#) may declare (or may help you decide whether to declare) an outbreak. They, in conjunction with medical practitioners caring for staff and residents, will provide guidance on how to manage the outbreak.

If an outbreak is suspected or confirmed, you should:

- confirm standard infection control precautions are in place and implement transmission-based precautions (contact and droplet precautions)
- bring your outbreak management team together
- isolate any suspected or confirmed cases and assign dedicated support workers to them
- liaise with medical practitioners to closely monitor symptoms
- schedule regular environmental cleaning and disinfection of all areas
- put up signage at entrances to inform essential visitors
- put up droplet precaution signage outside symptomatic person's rooms
- suspend all non-essential services and supports
- suspend all non-essential visitors.

More detailed information on outbreak management can be found in the [CDNA National Guidelines for the Prevention, Control and Public Health Management of COVID-19 Outbreaks in Residential Care Facilities](#).

## Further information, alerts and resources

The [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) information webpage](#) on the NDIS Commission website contains links to updates, training, alerts and other resources.

[State and territory Health Departments](#) have the latest information on COVID-19 relevant to your jurisdiction

[Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) Outbreaks in Residential Care Facilities – CDNA National Guidelines for the Prevention, Control and Public Health Management of COVID-19 Outbreaks in Residential Care Facilities in Australia](#)

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## Contact Us

**Call:** 1800 035 544 (free call from landlines). Our contact centre is open 9.00am 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.

**Email:** [contactcentre@ndiscommission.gov.au](mailto:contactcentre@ndiscommission.gov.au)

**Website:** [www.ndiscommission.gov.au](http://www.ndiscommission.gov.au)