
Targeted protections for people living in aged residential care – post-peak management of Omicron



The Government's COVID-19 response has always prioritised protecting older New Zealanders and those at greatest risk of hospitalisation, including those living in our aged residential care (ARC) facilities.

High vaccination rates among older New Zealanders has added an important layer of protection for our seniors, providing more certainty and choices as we move to the next phase in our COVID-19 response.

District Health Boards (DHBs) had a dedicated vaccination programme rolled out into aged residential care settings, and we introduced vaccine mandates for staff. With good levels of boosters, higher levels of population immunity and other targeted measures in ARCs in place, our focus now is to make life simpler and closer to normal.

Our ARC specific measures include -

Vaccinations:

- Vaccine mandates remain in place for workers in ARCs.
- All DHBs have completed their booster campaigns in ARCs, and booster rates are extremely high across the country in all facilities.
- The booster uptake for 70 and over is greater than 92%.
- More ARC focused vaccination drives continue to further lift booster rates.

Testing programme:

- We are providing guidance to ARCs about the use of Rapid Antigen Tests (RATs) in individual facilities.
- RATs have been placed proactively within ARCs to ensure testing is widely and easily available for staff, visitors and residents should they need it.
- Prioritising PCR testing for residents in ARCs.
- A special surveillance regime for staff in ARCs is in place to recognise the needs of this population group.
- Visitors are able to be tested using Ministry of Health supplied RATs prior to entering a facility.

Personal; protective equipment (PPE):

- PPE supply and support to ARCs is free.

Staffing:

- DHBs that choose can redeploy former Managed Isolation and Quarantine (MIQ) healthcare staff to ARCs.
- Canterbury DHB is one DHB that has done this.

Contact tracing:

- A more intensive contact tracing approach is in place when cases are found in ARCs.
- Each public health unit has a plan in place to manage outbreaks in high risk settings, like ARCs.

Visitor policies:

- The Ministry of Health is working with the sector to shift to "safe visiting policies" which support family connections and wellbeing.
- Even in instances where positive cases have been identified in the ARC facility.
- These policies make use of the Ministry supplied RATs, PPE and ARC IPC guidance.