

Industry Factsheet

COVID-19

This factsheet aims to give information on how health professionals and service providers working with older people and people with disability can protect themselves and their clients during the COVID-19 outbreak.

The novel coronavirus 2019-nCoV (COVID-19) outbreak has affected the entire world since the end of 2019. According to the [World Health Organisation](#), *“People of all ages can be infected by the new coronavirus (2019-nCoV). Older people, and people with pre-existing medical conditions (such as asthma, diabetes, heart disease) appear to be more vulnerable to becoming severely ill with the virus.”*

Information for service providers conducting home visits

Service providers should take appropriate measures to remain healthy and protect their clients' wellbeing while providing the necessary services. Older people and people with disability often have poorer health than the rest of the population. This makes them vulnerable to becoming more ill from COVID-19.

Some measures that can be taken from service providers that need to perform home visits, are:

- Re-schedule or cancel your visit if:
 1. you have travelled overseas in the last 4 weeks, or
 2. you are feeling unwell or have any flu type symptoms, such as sniffles, runny nose, sore throat, fever or cough.

- Call your clients before visiting and ask the above questions. If the client answers yes to any of the above, re-schedule or cancel your visit, if possible.
- Avoid unnecessary in-person meetings with clients or colleagues.

If it is necessary to carry out any work within the home for people with disability or older people during this emergency:

- The professional must protect the frail: Use a mask and latex disposable gloves so that you do not contaminate any surface that the person will be unable to clean or could get an infection from. You should apply hand sanitizer before putting on the gloves and entering the premises and only remove the gloves after leaving the premises.

Inform your clients in New South Wales and Victoria who rely on face-to-face supports that they can now use NDIS funding to buy masks and other personal protective equipment (PPE).

- The professional must protect themselves: If the person who needs the work carried out has COVID-19 or is in quarantine, you must use health level PPE which includes facemask, goggles, protective clothes (could be boiler suit) and double gloves, outer gloves can be builders gloves.

If a service provider has been in close contact with a client, that proved to have COVID-19 during the delivery of the services, and did not use appropriate PPE, these staff will be required to notify their employer and self-quarantine for 14 days. If the service providers used the appropriate PPE, they can continue to provide care to the client, and other clients, and do not need to self-quarantine (source DoH, FAQs on the use of PPE, published on March 26, 2020).

Detailed advice on visit restrictions is available from the [Australian Health Protection Principal Committee \(AHPPC\)](#) and in the [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Guide for Home Care Providers](#).

For further information you can visit the following websites:

- Occupational Therapy Australia [FAQs and Resources on COVID-19](#).
- American Physical Therapy Association [COVID-19 guidelines](#).

More specific information for contractors:

- [Master Builders COVID-19 \(Coronavirus\) and workplace issues update](#).
- [Coronavirus Information from the Master Builders Association of NSW](#).
- Article on [builderonline.com](#) about [Construction continuity versus the health risks on job](#)

sites.

Protective measures against COVID-19 for service providers

Medical gloves are intended to provide broad barrier protection. Gloves should be inspected prior to use and if there are concerns such as discoloration, visible holes or tears, the product should be discarded. Instructions on how to put on sterile gloves and other PPE are given by the [Australian Department of Health](#).

Some health professionals need to wear face shields while providing services. Recently two videos on [how to don and doff face shields](#) and on [how to clean a face shield](#) were provided by the Department of Health. A quick guide on how to use face shields can be found [here](#).

Aged care providers that require Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) must now email agedcarecovidppe@health.gov.au for all requests and should not approach Primary Health Networks. Requests can be made by aged care services and workers providing support to people receiving aged care support living in the community.

DoH informed that the following information must be provided in your email request:

- the facility, program or service requiring PPE;
- if you have had a confirmed case of COVID-19 at your facility, program or service;
- types and quantities of PPE required – please note, only masks are available at this stage and other PPE will be provided when available;
- details of other suppliers you have attempted to source PPE stock from.

Builders already use PPE for their safety at work but should consider increasing the degree of protection during the COVID-19 outbreak. Wearing medical gloves under their work gloves or using double gloves when cleaning surfaces is recommended. The builders gloves should be tight so that there is adequate friction between them and the medical gloves.

More information on the use of PPE is available at the following websites:

- World Health Organisation: [Rational use of personal protective equipment \(PPE\) for coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\)](#) and [When and how to use masks](#).
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: [Interim Guidance for Implementing Home Care of People Not Requiring Hospitalization for Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#).

- [NDIS Information for support workers and access to PPE.](#)
- [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) resources for health professionals, including aged care providers, pathology providers and health care managers.](#)

Master Builders Association NSW has published information about whether workers will be entitled to a compensation claim, depending on if and where they contracted COVID-19. More specifically, workers can get compensation when it can be proven that the virus was contracted in the course of employment but not when they isolate themselves because they have symptoms but they haven't contracted COVID-19. For more information you can visit [MBANSW website](#).

Telehealth services during the COVID-19 outbreak

Telehealth is the delivery of healthcare at a distance using information communications technology (ICT). Recently, the Federal Government announced a new Medicare funded telehealth service to be provided by doctors, nurses and mental health allied health workers (including mental health occupational therapists), currently authorised to use telehealth item numbers. This measure aims to protect both vulnerable patients and vulnerable health practitioners (aged at least 70 years old, indigenous and aged at least 50 years old, pregnant, parent of a child under 12 months, immune compromised or with chronic medical conditions that result in increased risk from coronavirus infection). For more information visit the Australian Department of Health [website](#).

NDIS permits participants, families and carers to request alternatives to face-to-face meetings, if the participants are concerned about their exposure to the coronavirus. Scheduled plan reviews and first plan meetings can be completed over the phone, if the participant:

- would prefer not to have a face-to-face meeting,
- has recently returned from overseas, or
- has met someone affected by coronavirus (COVID-19).

For more information you can check the NDIS [website](#).

Unfinished building works due to the COVID-19 outbreak

Under special circumstances, consumers may experience delayed or unfinished building works in their homes. During the COVID-19 outbreak, there could be [shortage in building systems and materials](#) and in assistive technology equipment supplies. Moreover, some contractors might be affected by the virus, or they might cease operations until the risk of being infected is reduced. Different insurers may have different clauses for work cessation, but long periods might trigger

policy exclusions. While works have stopped, the site should be maintained clean and secure. For more information, please visit the [Master Builders Association NSW website](#).

Delays in the home modifications of an older person or a person with a disability can have a serious impact on their wellbeing. If the contractor cannot complete the works in the foreseeable future, consumers could contact their Occupational Therapists, who can advise on alternative temporary solutions.

For disabilities and health issues developed during the virus outbreak and when an Occupational Therapist cannot assess the needs of a person, consumers can use a [Home Safety Self-Assessment Tool](#), in order to identify hazards in the home and equipment to modify and eliminate them. Moreover, people who can do their own home modifications, can download the HMinfo [DIYmodify App](#), that provides information and support for making changes to a home, for comfort, safety and easier living. To receive information about assistive technology, consumers can visit the website of [Assistive Technology Australia](#) and seek a temporary solution that would cover their needs.

Other useful links for the safety and hygiene of professionals and consumers

The HMinfo Clearinghouse collected and provides links to organisations' instructions and advice, that might help professionals keep themselves and their clients safe from COVID-19.

- The [World Health Organisation](#) (WHO) provides answers to any question related to the coronavirus. Amongst others, WHO has published a guide for keeping workplaces safe, including key considerations to prevent or reduce COVID-19 risks during meetings and events. The publication *Getting your workplace ready for COVID-19* can be downloaded [here](#). Another WHO useful publication is the [Mental Health Considerations during COVID-19 Outbreak](#) factsheet.
- [NSW Health COVID-19 resource page](#), with general information about the virus and how to keep safe.
- [Australian Government daily COVID-19 health alert](#).
- The Department of Health [Fact sheet on the use of surgical masks, Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) advice for the health and aged care sector](#) and [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) resources for health professionals, including aged care providers, pathology providers and healthcare managers](#).
- [Smarttraveller.gov.au COVID-19 travel advice](#).

- Master Builders Victoria COVID-19 (Coronavirus) and [workplace issues update](#).
- Occupational Therapy Australia [FAQs and Resources on COVID-19](#).
- [Cleaning guidelines for the prevention of COVID-19 infections](#) from the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health.
- [NDIS response to Coronavirus](#).

Where can I find more information?

The HMinfo Consumer Factsheet: Arranging Home Modifications, available from the www.homemods.info website

Sanford, J. A., Butterfield, T. (2005). Using Remote Assessment to Provide Home Modification Services to Underserved Elders. *The Gerontologist*, 45, 3, 389–398

Tomita M, Saharan S, Rajendran S, Schweitzer J, Nochajski S. (2014). Development, psychometrics and use of Home Safety Self-Assessment Tool (HSSAT). *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 68 (6): 711-718.

***This information was correct at time of printing.*