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| Winter and respiratory viruses: what you need to know How you can help protect loved ones in residential care this winter |

# What happens in winter?

Respiratory viruses like influenza (flu), COVID-19 and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) spread more easily in winter and are more common between April and October. These viruses can cause serious illness, especially for older people living in residential care facilities. Residential care facilities are more likely to experience outbreaks during these times, even with strong infection control measures in place.

# What you can do to help protect your loved ones:

## Get vaccinated

Vaccination is the best way to protect yourself and your loved ones from serious illness. Encourage others, including residents and visitors to residential care facilities to get vaccinated.

### Influenza (flu) vaccine

The flu vaccine is needed every year because the virus changes. The flu vaccine is free for:

* Children aged 6 months to under 5 years
* People aged 65 years and over
* Pregnant women (at any stage of pregnancy)
* Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 6 months and over
* People with certain health conditions.

### COVID-19

COVID-19 vaccines are free. Regular COVID-19 vaccines are recommended for people aged 65 years and over, or anyone at higher risk.

### Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) vaccines

RSV vaccines are now available for:

* People aged 75 years and over
* Some high-risk adults aged 60-74 years.

RSV vaccination is also recommended during pregnancy to protect newborns.

Talk to your GP or pharmacist for more information, to get the right protection for you and your family. It’s never too late to get vaccinated.

## Practise good hygiene

* **Wash your hands** with soap and water or use hand sanitiser before and after visiting.
* **Cover coughs and sneezes** with a tissue or your elbow, not your hand.
* **Throw used tissues in the bin** straight away and wash your hands afterwards.

## Stay home if you’re sick

**Do not visit a residential care facility** if:

* You have a **fever, cough, sore throat, runny nose** or feel tired and unwell.
* You have a cold, COVID-19, flu, RSV or another respiratory virus.
* You have been in contact with someone who is has COVID-19.

**Wait until your symptoms are resolved before visiting.**

## Follow the residential care facility’s safety rules

Look out for signs at the entrance. If there’s an outbreak you may be asked to:

* Wear a mask
* Limit your visit to just one person

Certain group activities may be postponed during an outbreak.

Always follow staff instructions. They are there to protect everyone.

## Want more information?

Visit the Department of Health website for full details:

[Don’t risk the flu. Get vaccinated today](https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/get-vaccinated) <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/get-vaccinated>

[COVID-19 | Better Health Channel](https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/covid-19-victoria) <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/covid-19-victoria>

[COVID-19 vaccine advice and recommendations](https://www.health.gov.au/our-work/covid-19-vaccines/getting-your-vaccination)

<https://www.health.gov.au/our-work/covid-19-vaccines/getting-your-vaccination>

[Influenza (flu) | Better Health Channel](https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/flu-influenza) <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/flu-influenza>

[Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) | Better Health Channel](https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/respiratory-syncytial-virus-rsv) <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/respiratory-syncytial-virus-rsv>

[Acute respiratory infection management in residential care facilities | health.vic.gov.au – Outbreak management guidelines for residential care facilities](https://www.health.vic.gov.au/infectious-diseases/acute-respiratory-infection-management-residential-care-facilities) <https://www.health.vic.gov.au/infectious-diseases/acute-respiratory-infection-management-residential-care-facilities>

**Thank you for helping protect your loved ones and keeping the wider community safe this winter.**

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