Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Tips for residential aged care providers

Information for residential aged care providers regarding coronavirus (COVID-19) and supporting people living with dementia.

In addition to the infection control measures aged care providers are implementing in response to coronavirus (COVID-19), the following outlines some considerations for people living with dementia. If you are concerned about the health of a person living with dementia, contact their GP directly.

Some initial suggestions on supporting people impacted by dementia are provided below and more detailed information is available through contacting the National Dementia Helpline on 1800 100 500.

Tips and strategies

Reduce heightened anxiety about coronavirus

- Ensure information provided is from an authoritative source (e.g. Commonwealth Department of Health)
- Minimise the flow of media information by turning off the 24-hour news cycle on TV
- Provide information and explanation to residents who are aware and concerned about what is happening
- Provide reassurance about the use of masks and personal protective equipment
- Use memory aids and visual prompts to explain in a simple way the current situation
• Make sure regular time is spent with residents to ask how they are going and if they have any questions
• Take the time to listen to the person and their concerns
• Validate how the person is feeling
• Provide reassurance
• Minimise staff discussion, speculation or opinions on the impact of COVID-19 in front of residents
• Avoid the use of negative language such as ‘lockdown’, ‘pandemic’ or ‘crisis’

Support continued engagement with families and carers

• Communicate with families through a variety of communication channels what the infection control measures are in relation to coronavirus (COVID-19) and where to go for further information
• Discourage visiting to your service if the visitor is unwell
• Encourage visitors to adhere to social distancing of 1.5 metres where possible and discuss with them in advance how visits should be conducted
• Encourage visitors to maintain strict hygiene measures
• Try to conduct visits in a resident’s room, outdoors or in a specific designated area at the facility and not in communal areas, to minimise the risk of transmission
• Maintain open communication with residents and their families and provide regular updates to families about the wellbeing of the resident
• Provide reassurance to families about the infection control measures you have in place
• Try to arrange other means of communication – iPad, video call apps, phone calls, or social media messaging, if applicable. Make appointments with family to Skype or FaceTime
• Be understanding and listen to concerns of family and residents
• Try to respond in a timely manner to questions and concerns of residents and their families
• Escalate to supervisor if unable to answer questions or concerns
• Understand this is a stressful time for everyone

Maintain physical health

• Staff may need to provide people living with dementia with additional support to ensure infection control procedures are adhered to

• People living with dementia may need extra support to maintain proper hand hygiene. The following five tips relate specifically to this:
  o Consider placing dementia friendly instructional signs in bathrooms and elsewhere to remind people with dementia to wash their hands with soap for at least 20 seconds.
  o Give a demonstration of thorough hand washing. Consider singing a song to encourage them to wash their hands for at least 20 seconds.
  o If the person with dementia cannot get to a sink to wash their hands, hand sanitiser or anti-bacterial hand wipes may be a quick alternative. Hand sanitiser is only effective if hands are not visibly dirty.
  o Encourage them to cough or sneeze into a tissue or their elbow, instead of into their hands and ensure the tissue is then discarded in the bin.
  o More tips on hand washing can be found at www1.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/content/how-to-wash-and-dry-hands

Promote appropriate social connection and engagement

• Consider creating a buddy system between residents or between residents and staff to strengthen support networks

• Look at maintaining social support through smaller groups with social distancing principles where feasible (e.g. meetings in larger spaces or outside)
- Encourage music and singing so that others can join in
- Use the overhead speakers to play interactive games (bingo could work)
- Encourage regular opportunity to walk outside and exercise, especially where this is part of the resident’s usual routine
- Encourage family and friends to drop off care packages with letters from family or encourage local school children to write letters or draw pictures to send to residents
- Encourage the person to consider doing some gentle exercises, either in a chair or around their room
- Access online exercise or music programs for older people
- Use technology, such as iPads to access online games and social engagement. Options include ‘A better visit’ app (dementialearning.org.au/technology/a-better-visit-app/), a virtual zoo (zoo.org.au/animal-house) or virtual museum (artsandculture.google.com/)
- Provide other activities such as colouring-in, magazines, folding, sock matching, movies, talking books

**Recognise and address emerging behaviours**

- Increase staffing levels to spend more time engaging with residents. Encourage your residents to participate in everyday activities when providing one on one care
- Maintain regular routine as much as possible
- Keep residents active to avoid boredom and reduce napping during the day
- Maximise access to natural light
- For residents whose usual routine is to walk around the service independently, provide regular walks and access to outdoors
- Seek to respond to changed behaviours in a timely way should they emerge
• Use non-pharmacological approaches to respond to changed or heightened behaviours

• Use visual prompts to remind residents of restricted access

• Avoid the use of restrictive practices

• Apply a sequenced problem-solving approach to changed behaviours (e.g. CAUSEd – for more on that, see dementialearning.org.au and search for ‘behaviours’)

• Or contact the Dementia Behaviour Management Advisory Service (DBMAS) on 1800 699 799

For further advice contact our National Dementia Helpline on 1800 100 500.

The Centre for Dementia Learning has a comprehensive range of education programs to help aged care providers address many of the issues raised above. For further details contact 1300 DEMENTIA. You can also find a wide range of resources at the Dementia Australia library: dementia.org.au/library

The coronavirus situation is rapidly evolving. This information is provided as a guide only and may not be appropriate for every situation. For up to date information on the coronavirus, visit www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert

The above information was based on information provided by Alzheimer’s Disease Chinese (ADC) and shared by Alzheimer’s Disease International. You can find the full presentation here: www.alz.co.uk/news/covid-19-sharing-experience-and-advice-from-adis-member-association-in-china

Dementia Australia would like to acknowledge Alzheimer’s Disease International and Alzheimer’s Chinese for their advice in putting together this help sheet.