



# Vulnerable groups – government guidelines

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## Changes from previous published version highlighted in yellow

### Purpose

This tool aims to guide managers / ministry agents with employees / workers / members who are identified at higher risk from the effects of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) due to existing health conditions and/or their personal circumstances. It details the current advice pertaining to various persons deemed to be more vulnerable to the impact of COVID-19.

### Scope

The information is supplied to assist a person charged with the management of the person's safety and wellbeing in accordance with work health and safety obligations in the decision-making process.

### Vulnerable Persons

The following may be considered a vulnerable person COVID-19:

- Over 70 years of age
- Over 65 years of age who have existing health conditions or comorbidities, and
- First Nations People over the age of 50 who have existing health conditions or comorbidities,
- Are significantly immunocompromised or taking immunosuppression therapy.
- Certain diseases or conditions may cause a weakened immune system placing people at greater risk of suffering complications, if they become sick from COVID-19. These include:
  - Kidney disease
  - Coronary heart disease or congestive heart failure
  - Chronic lung disease including moderate to severe asthma, cystic fibrosis, bronchiectasis, suppurative lung disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease or chronic emphysema
  - Poorly controlled diabetes
  - Poorly controlled hypertension
  - Cancer
  - Genetic immune deficiencies
  - Chronic liver disease.

### Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) advice

AHPPC considers that, based on the limited current evidence, the following people are, or are likely to be, at higher risk of serious illness if they are infected with the virus:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people 50 years and older with one or more chronic medical conditions,
- People 65 years and older with chronic medical conditions. Conditions included in the definition of 'chronic medical conditions' will be refined as more evidence emerges. The most current list can be accessed on the Department of Health [website](#),
- People 70 years and older,

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- People with compromised immune systems ([see Department of Health website](#))

AHPPC recommends that where vulnerable workers undertake essential work, a risk assessment must be undertaken. Risk needs to be assessed and mitigated with consideration of the characteristics of the worker, the workplace and the work. This includes ensuring vulnerable people are redeployed to non-customer-based roles where possible. Where risk cannot be appropriately mitigated, employers and employees should consider alternate arrangements to accommodate a workplace absence.

AHPPC recommends that special provisions apply to essential workers who are at higher risk of serious illness and, where the risk cannot be sufficiently mitigated, should not work in high risk setting.

The federal government has also developed an [individual action plan](#) for all vulnerable persons to consider completing to know measures to take depending on the community transmission of COVID-19.

## Queensland Health advice for older Queenslanders

The risk of serious illness from COVID-19 increases as you get older. Globally the highest rate of fatalities from COVID-19 is among older people.

### Can I leave my house?

Restrictions are now easing, which means you can leave your home for more than just essential reasons. Read the [roadmap to easing Queensland's restrictions \(PDF\)](#) to learn more about what you can and can't do in each stage.

We strongly encourage seniors to protect themselves and leave their homes in a careful and considered way. For example, visit children and grandchildren who are well in small groups and avoid shopping centres and other public places during peak periods when crowds are bigger.

If you are sick, or have symptoms of COVID-19, stay home and call a GP who can test you for COVID-19.

### What else can I do to protect myself?

Because you fall into a vulnerable group, even if you are feeling well it is important to take steps to prevent the spread of this virus. Good hygiene and social distancing are the best defences for you against COVID-19.

To reduce your risk, it is important to follow [these prevention measures](#).

It is important that you get the 2020 flu vaccination as soon as it is available from your GP or pharmacy.

### How can I get food?

Accessing grocery stores is now considered safe for Older Queenslanders.

Some supermarkets have special arrangements for older people, including online food delivery services. Please contact your local supermarket for more information on these services.

### Can I have visitors?

You can have visitors but there are [limits on the number of people you should have in your home](#). Read the [roadmap to easing Queensland's restrictions \(PDF\)](#) to learn more about what you can and can't do in each stage. If you would like to have visitors or are planning to visit others, it is important that you follow the [social distancing guidelines](#) to stay safe.

These limits do not apply to carers, support workers or other essential service providers.

### How can I stay connected with my friends and family?

Social distancing does not mean you cannot be social, keep the conversations going by:

- Chatting on the phone
- Having a video call
- Writing an email
- Or even reading your grandchildren a story over a video call.

To find out more about how to stay in touch while being physically apart, [read our blog](#).



## Queensland Health advice for people with compromised immune system

Having a compromised immune system (also called immunocompromised) means a person has a weakened immune system, which reduces the body's ability to fight infections and other diseases. It also reduces a person's ability to recover from infections. Anyone could develop serious or severe illness from COVID-19, but those with chronic health conditions or weakened immune systems are at greater risk.

### How do I stay healthy during COVID-19?

It is important to maintain healthy habits during this time to keep your immune system as strong as possible. Emotional stress, lack of sleep and physical exhaustion can impact your immune system further, making you more susceptible to illness.

Try to:

- Get plenty of sleep—aim for eight hours every night
- Eat a healthy diet that includes plenty of fruit and vegetables
- [Take steps to relieve stress](#)—try yoga, meditation or light exercise you can do at home.

Find more suggestions on how to stay healthy at home on the [Healthier. Happier. website.](#)

### Should I go to work?

If you have a compromised immune system, it is best to stay at home as much as possible. This includes working from home when you can. If you work for an essential service, contact your employer for advice about your situation.

### Should I attend my usual healthcare appointments?

At this stage of the pandemic, it is important that you go to your usual, confirmed appointment with your doctor or other healthcare professionals. People with chronic health conditions may get very sick if their regular healthcare services and appointments are stopped. Putting off your healthcare checks can be dangerous and now is not the time to delay getting the care you need.

If you are worried about going to see your healthcare provider in person, contact them to see if you are eligible for a telehealth appointment.

### What about my usual care arrangements?

Any essential carers or visitors who support you with your everyday needs can continue to visit unless they have any of the symptoms of COVID-19.

Everyone coming to your home should practice good hygiene and social distancing, where possible.

## Queensland Health advice for First Nations people

### How can I protect myself?

First Nations people are at risk of getting very sick from COVID-19. Even if you are feeling well it is important to take steps to prevent the virus from spreading.

Good hygiene and social distancing (also called physical distancing), are the best defences against COVID-19.

It is important that you talk to your doctor or pharmacy about getting a flu jab as soon as it is available.

[Find out more about how you can protect yourself and others.](#)

### Practical tips for social (physical) distancing

It can be difficult to practice social (physical) distancing if you:

- share a small residence with other people
- live in over-crowded homes or communities
- share a house with a large or extended family
- live between several residences.

These [practical tips](#) can help protect those who are most vulnerable in your mob or community.



### Can I leave my house?

The rules around leaving your house are relaxing. [You can now leave your house for more activities.](#)

These rules do not apply to people who live in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. If you live in a remote community you need to follow [travel restrictions](#) to keep you and your community safe.

### Can I have visitors at my home?

Even if they seem healthy and well, visitors could put your health at risk. Where contact with people is essential you must follow the guidelines on [social distancing \(also called physical distancing\)](#).

In Queensland there are [restrictions on the number of people you should have in your home](#). These limits do not apply to carers, support workers or other essential service providers.

These limits are changing often so check the website or ask your local council, hospital or clinic.

## Relevant government links

[Australian Health Protection Principals Committee](#)

[Queensland Health advice for older Queenslanders](#)

[Queensland Health advice for First Nations people](#)

[Queensland Health advice for people with a compromised immune system](#)

## Related documents

[Synod-wide work health and safety policy](#)

[Coronavirus COVID-19 resources](#)

[Synod-wide privacy policy](#)

## Definitions

Term	Meaning
COVID-19	Novel coronavirus formally named SARS-CoV-2. The clinical disease state resulting from an infection with SARS-CoV-2 is known as COVID-19. COVID-19 is highly transmissible from person-to-person and readily spreads to close contacts of infected individuals.

## Revisions

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Version	Approval date	Approved by	Effective date	Policy owner	Policy contact
3.0	23.11.2020	General Secretary	23.11.2020	COVID Coordinator	COVID Coordinator
Next scheduled review		23.11.2021			