



## **Illawarra Diggers Family and Visitor COVID-19 Update**

**Thursday 10 March 2022**

**Dear Family Members and Visitors**

**RE: Illawarra Diggers Remain In Covid-19 Outbreak**

**Good afternoon**

In the last week we have had further positive COVID cases among both residents and staff.

We now have active cases in Bundeena, Corrimal, Warilla, Auxillary and Albion Park Wings. These wings are in isolation and residents are currently confined to their rooms.

We have been meeting with the Public Health Unit on pretty much a daily or twice daily basis throughout this Outbreak and they have been very supportive and willing to listen to our input as to the best management of our residents from both a clinical and mental health perspective. In fact, throughout the pandemic, the Public Health Unit and the Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District have been excellent to deal with and very supportive.

Our Outbreak Management Team has also been meeting regularly to discuss our own internal strategies in regard to the Outbreak, which also focusses on individual residents and their needs.

### **Isolation of Wings**

The following measures are based on PHU advice and the current infections and will continue to be reviewed, especially if more residents test positive in these or other wings.

1. Albion Park
  - a. Non Infected residents expected to be allowed out of their rooms but remain in their wing – 16/3/22
  - b. Wing expected to be open; Non infected residents can leave their rooms and the wing – 19/3/22
2. Auxillary
  - a. Non Infected residents expected to be allowed out of their rooms but remain in their wing – 11/3/22
  - b. Wing expected to be open; Non infected residents can leave their rooms and the wing – 14/3/22
3. Bundeena
  - a. Non Infected residents expected to be allowed out of their rooms but remain in their wing – 10/3/22
  - b. Wing expected to be open; Non infected residents can leave their rooms and the wing – 12/3/22
4. Corrimal
  - a. Non Infected residents expected to be allowed out of their rooms but remain in their wing – 11/3/22
  - b. Wing expected to be open; Non infected residents can leave their rooms and the wing – 14/3/22
5. Warilla
  - a. Non Infected residents expected to be allowed out of their rooms but remain in their wing – 10/3/22
  - b. Wing expected to be open; Non infected residents can leave their rooms and the wing – 12/3/22
6. Austinmer and Wollongong Wings are not in isolation and continue to use the Main Dining Room for all meals. One visitor per resident per day are allowed to these wings.
7. Caringbah and Woonona Wings are not in isolation, however the residents have been asked to remain in their wings as much as possible and will have morning and afternoon tea in their wings rather than the Main Dining Room. One visitor per resident per day are allowed to these wings.
8. Keira Wing is not in isolation.
9. All non-isolated wings can use the Recreation Room and move about the home, however this is not actively encouraged and large gatherings and entertainment has been suspended for this week.

## PCR and/or Rapid Antigen Testing for Residents, Staff and Visitors

Under advice from the PHU the following testing regime is being implemented at Illawarra Diggers during this Outbreak and will continue until advised by the PHU:

1. ALL **Staff** and **Visitors** will be required to have a negative RAT result prior to entry to Illawarra Diggers (ie beyond the reception foyer).
  - a. Visitors have the option to do a RA test offsite just before visiting and to bring the test as evidence of the negative result; **or**
  - b. A RAT will be administered to Visitors upon entry but they will need to wait in the foyer or outside for the 15 minutes that is required for the test to return the result.
  - c. There is no cost to the visitor for this test.
  - d. With the exception as per Point 2, a negative RAT result is a condition of entry.
2. Where Visitors have previously had a positive PCR result (ie been COVID positive) more than 7 days prior to entry, and provide evidence of this, they are not required to undertake a RA test for 8 weeks from the date of the positive PCR result as they are deemed by the CDNA Guidelines to be a negligible risk.
3. Because of the increased testing of visitors it is essential that visitors book their visits with admin. Visitors who attend without an appointment may need to wait until a staff member is available to administer the test.
4. All residents and staff will have a PCR test every three days.
5. Consistent with the Industry Code for Visiting in Aged Care, residents can go out for **approved medical appointments only**.
6. If residents leave the home for reasons other than directly to and from approved medical appointments then, upon return, they will be required to undertake a Rapid Antigen Test as well as a PCR test and will be required to isolate in their room for the 24-48 hours required for the PCR result to be returned by the lab.

As I stated earlier, this is an evolving situation, unfortunately being experienced in hundreds of aged care homes across the country. I met with all available staff today (care, hospitality and administrative staff) to ensure a consistent understanding of the current status of our residents and our home. We are very fortunate to have a great team of caring and professional people across every department and the health and wellbeing of our residents is our main priority.

If you have any questions at all, please contact the admin office and we will answer your specific concerns or questions.

Since the last memo, NSW have updated their advice for Residential Aged Care which I have included below. This includes the new mandate that all staff are now required to have a third vaccine. More than two-thirds of our staff are triple vaccinated as well as 98% of our residents.

## **Peter Whittall - CEO**

The following advice for Residential Aged Care Facilities is for Non-Outbreak conditions. The additional restriction listed above are in place as Illawarra Diggers is currently in Outbreak.

### **1. Resident and Visitor Restrictions (Updated as per advice of 1 March)**

#### **Residents**

- Residents are permitted to leave the facility and attend small family gatherings or for other reasons but must abide by the current Public Health (COVID-19 General) Order (No 2) 2021.
- Residents who leave the facility to attend a family gathering and return on the same day should, on return, have a RAT on days 2, 4 and 7 after they return. If well, residents do not need to isolate. If they develop any signs or symptoms of COVID-19 they should immediately be isolated and have a RAT or PCR test.
- Residents who do not return the same day should be isolated until they have a negative PCR, (RAT if delays in PCR processing) the day of return with subsequent tests on day 3, 5 and 7 after they return.
- **Residents should get a booster dose as soon as they are eligible for one.**
- Residents should not leave the facility if they have COVID-19 symptoms until they have had a RAT or PCR test and have received a negative result.

#### **Visitors**

**Residents are permitted to have two fully vaccinated visitors aged 12 years and over, plus two children aged under 12 years per day:**

- Visitors aged 12 years and over must have received a second dose of a COVID vaccination at least 14 days prior to their visit.
- Visitors are strongly encouraged to get a booster vaccine if they are eligible for one, and to have a negative Rapid Antigen Testing (RAT) prior to each visit
- Up to 2 children under 12 years are permitted to visit provided they are accompanied by a fully vaccinated person.
- Babies and toddlers under 3 years of age should not wear a mask as it is a choking hazard.

- Wherever possible, the visit should be in an outdoor area. Visits should not be in any inside communal areas. All visitors must wear a surgical mask over their nose and mouth while visiting indoors. For reasons when masks can be removed please see [Additional Advice – Mandatory mask wearing](#).
- People who are providing a service to the resident (including a health or other professional service) are not counted as a visitor.
- Existing requirements in the Public Health (COVID-19 Care Services) Order 2021 on visiting residents who are at end of life remain in place.

### **Palliative and End of Life Care**

- The exemption is subject to the condition that the operator of the facility takes reasonable steps to ensure:
  - no more than 4 people (including children) visit at any one time
  - all visitors wear a mask while in an indoor area, unless the visitor is interacting with the resident they are visiting
  - there is minimal interaction between the visitors and the staff and other residents
- The visitors in this circumstance do not need to be vaccinated, however appropriate care must be taken if unvaccinated visitors are entering the facility. It is strongly recommended:
  - the visit is solely inside the resident's room and
  - where possible, the visitors perform a Rapid Antigen Testing (RAT) just before the visit

### **Visitors must not enter the home if they:**

- have COVID-19 symptoms
- have been exposed to COVID-19 unless they have completed their self-isolation and testing requirements. People who have had high risk exposures should not enter high risk settings for at least 14 days since their exposure to a COVID-positive person.
- are waiting for a COVID-19 test result.
- have been overseas in the previous 14 days, unless they are:
  - fully vaccinated, it has been at least 7 days after arrival and they have received a negative rapid antigen test 6 days or later after arriving in NSW

Arrangements for approved visits under exceptional circumstances are required to be made in advance. Any approved visitors will still be required to undergo the screening process as before and will need to provide evidence of their vaccinations. Staff will need to sight the COVID certificate which includes the vaccination dates (these are included on the Australian Government COVID-19 Certificate). If possible, visitors are asked to provide a printed copy of the vaccination certificate for the resident's file.

**For this reason, visitor entry will still be restricted to between 8.30am and 4pm Monday to Sunday.**

### **Access To and From Illawarra Diggers**

Please be reminded that access **To** and **From** our home is strictly via the Main Entrance. This has not changed.

You will also need to continue to use the NSW QR Code and show proof of using code on the NSW COVID App or sign in in the register. Only the main entrance has the provision for screening and signing in and out. This is still a strict requirement imposed on residential aged care homes by NSW Health.

Some family members are exiting the home via the Woonona Door or the bottom car park lift. They have been observed by staff and also on CCTV. This means they are not signing out. Please assist us to maintain control of our home for the sake of our residents and other families. Please do the right thing as these rules are only put in place for the safety of our residents.

## **2. Rapid Antigen Tests**

Since the initial Outbreak, the government have started providing RAT kits on a routine basis rather than by request. Therefore we continue to have sufficient stock at hand to conduct tests on residents or staff as required.

As in the advice above regarding resident visitors and outings, NSW Health are now advising all visitors to aged care homes and those taking residents out, to strongly consider having a Rapid Antigen Test to ensure the safety of our vulnerable older community and the staff who support them.

We do not like isolating residents on return while they await a PCR test any more than the residents like being isolated. However, this may be a strategy we need to implement on occasion depending on the identified risks and the resident's health.

## **3. General**

This is an ever changing and complex scenario. It is very confusing and stressful for the general public. But it is also very confusing and stressful for our staff as well. The rules are constantly changing and front desk, lifestyle and care staff are being confronted by sometimes stressed and upset families asking specific questions regarding their family members.

Please have patience and understanding with our staff. Their absolute primary goal is the health and wellbeing of our residents. They are being updated on information but are also being asked to refer issues to either Chloe or myself to ensure a consistent response in line with the latest Health advice.

We will all continue to work collectively for the good of our residents as we have done in the past.

If you have any requests or suggestions relating to your family member during these easing visiting periods please contact our Lifestyle Team on their general email address at [lifestyle@illawaradiggers.com.au](mailto:lifestyle@illawaradiggers.com.au);

If you have any questions relating to this advice, or for administrative issues relating to appointments or other matters, please contact [admin@illawarradiggers.com.au](mailto:admin@illawarradiggers.com.au) or call on 02 4225 4700.

As previously advised, if you wish to **deliver anything** to your family, you will need to do so in office hours, **Monday to Sunday 8.30am to 4.30pm**. The office staff or Weekend Coordinator will accept the delivery and ensure it gets to your family member.

Please do not visit or deliver anything outside of these times as the admin office is not attended and care staff may be taken away from attending to residents to answer the door or they may not attend the front door if they are busy.

Should you require further information regarding COVID-19, please refer to the Commonwealth Department of Health website:

<https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert>

and the NSW Health website which gives information specific to residential care in NSW:

<https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/covid-19/Pages/racf-latest-advice.aspx>

We will continue to update our procedures and protocols in line with government guidelines and to communicate with our residents and our families and Illawarra Diggers community.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter Whittall', written over a light grey circular stamp.

Peter Whittall  
CEO