



Illawarra Diggers Family and Visitor COVID-19 Update

Thursday 3 March 2022

Dear Family Members and Visitors

RE: Illawarra Diggers In Covid-19 Outbreak

Good afternoon

Five weeks after closing our first outbreak on 20 January, a resident at Illawarra Diggers tested positive for COVID-19 last Friday 25 February.

This led to a large number of residents and staff being tested. Initially the single positive case was deemed an “exposure” rather than an “Outbreak” by the public health unit and was managed with the resident being isolated in their room.

Since last Friday approximately 9 more residents have returned positive RAT results. Each of these was followed up with a PCR test and fortunately 6 of the 9 residents had false positive RATs and subsequently returned negative PCR tests. To try to eliminate these false positives, when we get a positive RAT result, we are doing a second RAT test with a different brand of RAT and also immediately taking a PCR sample (which gets sent to the lab for analysis).

As it stands today, there are 4 active COVID-19 cases at Illawarra Diggers: 2 in Bundeena, 1 in Corrimal and 1 in Warilla Wings. These three wings are in isolation (more on that below). In addition, 1 staff member has tested positive at work, bringing the total number of staff absent due to positive COVID to 4, although there is no evidence as to where the staff acquired their infection ie work, family or community.

None of the 4 residents are showing any signs of illness and remain in isolation in their rooms for the minimum 7 day period when they will be reassessed for ongoing isolation.

We have been in consultation with the public health unit each day since the first case was identified last Friday. At the PHU's request we have kept all three affected wings in isolation rather than just the infected residents themselves. Once we see no escalation in transmission, we would like to be able to open the wings up for the other non-positive residents to come out of isolation but the PHU are recommending against that at the moment as the source of the infection or its common mode of transmission has not been identified.

As soon as it is deemed safe to do so, in consultation with the PHU, we will open up the wings again and allow residents to leave and visitors to enter.

Yesterday we did RAT tests on all residents and staff. Today we have done PCR tests on all residents and staff as a new baseline.

There are a number of measures in place at Illawarra Diggers as at today. These are reviewed daily by our Outbreak Management Team, consistent with the recommendations of the PHU, and will change in accordance with the status of the outbreak:

1. Bundeena, Warilla and Corrimal Wings are in isolation
 - a. Residents remain in their rooms and receive all meals, snacks etc in their rooms
 - b. No visitors to these wings at present
2. Auxiliary, Austinmer and Wollongong Wings are not in isolation and continue to use the Main Dining Room for all meals. Visitors are allowed to these wings.
3. Caringbah, Albion Park 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. Visitors are allowed to these wings.
4. 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.
5. Consistent with the Outbreak Guidelines, we have temporarily restricted visitors to non-isolated wings to One Visitor per Resident per Day.

This is different to the general Visitor Guidelines (dated 1 March) detailed below and is such because we are in an active Outbreak scenario.

6. Consistent with the Industry Code for Visiting in Aged Care, residents can go out for medical appointments only. We will take advice on this from the PHU and advise as soon as this changes.
7. It is not that the risk to residents from visitors has increased in the last week, it is more about our ability to deal with increasing number of infected residents while maintaining our standard of care to all residents. Managing isolated wings and COVID positive residents in full PPE as well as managing healthy but isolated residents is more labour intensive and “intense” for staff than the norm, which I am sure can be appreciated.

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;

If you have any questions relating to this advice, or for administrative issues relating to appointments or other matters, please contact admin@illawaradiggers.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,



Peter Whittall
CEO