Caring for Older People and People with Disability at Home During Winter

Infection, Illness, and Wellbeing: What Carers Need to Know

Why This Matters

Older people and people with disability are at higher risk of serious illness from infections such as influenza (flu), COVID-19, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), and other common viruses.

Simple prevention steps can make a big difference to keeping people safe, comfortable, and at home during winter.

What carers and family members can do to reduce the risk of illness

Support Vaccination

Vaccination helps prevent serious illness and hospitalisation.

Encourage and help arrange recommended vaccines, including:

- Influenza (flu) vaccination every year (free for those over 65 years age)
- RSV vaccine for older adults (now free for those over 75 years of age and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people over 60 years of age)
- COVID-19 boosters as recommended

Vaccines are free for many older people and those with medical risk factors.

Practice Good Hand Hygiene

Good hygiene protects both carers and care recipients.

- Wash hands with soap and water before and after care tasks
- Use alcohol-based hand sanitiser if handwashing isn't available
- Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue or elbow
- Support the person with using step-by-step prompts or visual cues

Clean frequently touched surfaces (door handles, phones, remotes)

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Stay Away If You Are Unwell

Do not provide in-person care if you:

- Have a fever, cough, sore throat, runny nose, vomiting or diarrhoea
- Have tested positive for COVID-19, flu, RSV or gastro
- Are feeling generally unwell or unusually tired

This is one of the most important ways to protect vulnerable people.

Recognising Illness

Illness can present differently in some older adults and some people with disability. Watch for:

- Sudden confusion or increased agitation
- Reduced appetite or fluid intake
- Changes in mobility or increased falls
- Drowsiness or weakness
- New incontinence (bladder or bowel accidents)

These may be early signs of infection, even without fever or cough.

If the person you care for becomes unwell:

- Keep them comfortable and well hydrated
- Monitor symptoms and changes closely
- Encourage rest
- Contact their GP, nurse, or health service early

Call 000 if there is severe breathing difficulty, chest pain, or sudden collapse.

Early care can prevent hospital admission.

For more information visit our website:
www.bendigohealth.org.au/LMPHU

Or the Better Health Channel:
www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

Or speak with a healthcare provider

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