

Advice for residential care services to inform service level Business Continuity Planning in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic

This guide is to assist residential care services in the development of plans around service delivery during the ongoing pandemic, in recognition that children and young people in residential care are a highly vulnerable cohort, and may exhibit behaviours which put them at greater risk of infection. Being prepared is one of the best ways to lessen the impact of an infectious disease outbreak like COVID-19.

It is essential that all services adopt an approach that continues service delivery as far as possible, while keeping children and young people, and staff in a safe environment. Of particular importance is ensuring support for children and young people continues to be delivered in a trauma-informed, therapeutic way. This may be difficult for staff who are also feeling stressed and vulnerable, therefore planning and communication are incredibly important.

For children and young people who have experienced trauma, social distancing and isolation may impact their mental health and behaviours. Staff should reflect on the principles of the Hope and Healing Trauma Informed Therapeutic Framework for Residential Care to ensure their practice continues to meet the needs of vulnerable children and young people.

Preventable police call-outs also continues to be an issue for many residential care services. Services should consider their strategies to avoid unnecessary calls to police and ensure they have strategies in place to de-escalate and engage children and young people, particularly given the additional stress and uncertainty they may be feeling at this time. Services are asked to refer to the [Joint Agency Protocol for reducing preventable police call-outs to residential care services](#).

The table below is not designed as a prescriptive list but rather as a tool to support your service planning. Place-based local solutions will need to be considered to ensure the best use of available resources in your community. This may include collaboration and cooperation with other funded residential care providers, such as designating a specific house for self-isolation or sharing workers.

The department will share updated advice as it is available through regional email channels to service providers.

For more information on Business Continuity Planning refer to the following links:

- Community Services Industry Alliance <https://csialtd.com.au/disastermanagement>
- Queensland Council of Social Services <https://communitydoor.org.au/planning-and-evaluation/business-continuity>

NOTE: Authoritative information regarding COVID-19 health requirements is available through the Australian and Queensland Health Department web links below. Services are encouraged to review this site regularly for updated advice: <https://www.health.qld.gov.au/clinical-practice/guidelines-procedures/diseases-infection/diseases/coronavirus> ; <https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert>

Scenario/Activation stage	Recommended actions
<p data-bbox="203 240 618 304">General preparation pre virus impacting service</p> <p data-bbox="203 344 618 408">Now – all services to implement planning</p>	<ul data-bbox="757 240 1951 272" style="list-style-type: none"> • Business Continuity Plan development needs to be re-visited as advice is updated. <p data-bbox="730 312 1178 344">Clients - Communication is key:</p> <ul data-bbox="757 349 2074 1134" style="list-style-type: none"> • Access information about how to talk to children and young people about the situation to allay fears. PeakCare has developed a list of useful resources on how to talk with children and young people about the virus. Refer to links at the end of this document. There are many excellent resources becoming increasingly available. Access and share these across your networks as appropriate. • Explain what social distancing means and why it is important, and implement it as far as possible, for example not sharing clothes or using another person’s phone. The rules continue to change so keep up to date with the latest advice. • Communicate clearly and regularly (including the use of visual prompts) with children and young people about good hygiene, handwashing practices and social distancing. • Ensure all children and young people understand what they need to do if they start to feel unwell (e.g. make staff aware, try to stay away from other children and young people and staff in the house, etc.), and ensure all staff know what to do if children and young people are reporting symptoms of the virus. • Ensure children and young people know where they can get age appropriate information of their own about the virus. • Ensure children and young people have access to mobile phones and credit to provide ongoing communication. • Where children and young people are often absent from their placement, ensure they have access to appropriate contact numbers and procedures for accessing medical attention and advice if they begin to feel unwell outside of the residential care service. • Consider any additional measures you may need to take for high risk children and young people who are often absent from their placement. <p data-bbox="730 1174 954 1206">Service access:</p> <ul data-bbox="757 1211 2051 1345" style="list-style-type: none"> • Restrict access to service by all non-essential visitors and establish other ways of engaging with essential visitors to minimise access (such as tele-appointments where appropriate). • Consider rostering of activities to reduce spread of possible infections e.g. use of shared spaces. • Consider stopping group activities as directed by latest health authority advice.

- Consider travel needs of children and young people and how to minimise risk of infection e.g. minimise use of public transport.
- Ensure there are communication protocols in place with the department and other residential care services should a child or young person be diagnosed with the virus and the residential care service needs to be locked down.

Essential supplies:

- Consider what essential items children and young people may need if self-isolation is required e.g. medication
- Access supplies of appropriate Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) e.g. masks; gloves etc. and ensure children and young people, and staff are trained in correct usage of PPEs.
- Source supply of necessities including hygiene products, medical supplies, etc.
- Identify alternative supply chains as usual sources become unavailable.
- Consider additional needs of children and young people with mental health or drug and alcohol impacts and how these can be managed. What extra supplies might be needed? What management strategies may need to be employed if a child or young person exhibits withdrawal symptoms? Are there plans in place if access to mental health services is more difficult?
- Planning for shopping – due to some of the restrictions on the number of items that can be purchased, additional shops may need to be undertaken.
- Prepare food reserves – pre-cooked frozen meals; non-perishable staples; long life milk and consider dietary requirements.
- Network with local service system about shared availability of essentials, resources and supports.

Plan for school closures:

- Stock up on age-appropriate activities.
- Arrange access to schooling equipment and consider how staff can facilitate school learning if it is delivered only on-line or through home-schooling resources and support (e.g. [Learning@Home](#))
- Provide clear advice and factual, non-dramatic information that reduces stress and alarm in children and young people.

Staffing impacts:

- As part of Business Continuity Planning, develop a staff contingency plan in the event of an outbreak where unwell staff members need to be excluded from work for a prolonged period until

	<p>cleared to return to work. The contingency plan should be able to cover a 20-30% staff absentee rate.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure register of staff is current and updated as needed, including next of kin, email and phone contacts. • Ensure all staff and children and young people (where appropriate) have access to medical contact numbers and procedures for accessing medical attention and advice and know when to seek it. • Train staff in infection control. • Plan for impacts on staff rostering. Consider now how to manage the home if children and young people are required to self-isolate. • Network with local service system and negotiate plans for supporting each other to keep services functioning. <p>Physical environment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with children and young people in the residential care service to prepare an outbreak management plan to help staff and children and young people identify, respond to and manage a potential outbreak; protect the health of staff and children and young people, and reduce the severity and duration of outbreaks if they occur. This should include making sure everyone is aware of what they need to do in terms of cleaning, isolating and using PPE if someone starts feeling ill or they find out they have been in contact with someone who is diagnosed with the virus. • Consider configuration of shared spaces and internal unit spaces to support infection control. • Increase cleaning regimes – especially all hard surfaces. • Should some areas be temporarily shut down (e.g. Playground equipment) – or limited to a restricted number of people at one time? • Is there an area that can be set aside as an isolation room if it is needed?
<p>Symptoms reported:</p> <p>SELF-ISOLATION Scenarios to consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child or young person comes into contact with someone who is diagnosed with the virus and need to self-isolate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access latest professional health authority and medical advice daily as it continues to be updated. • Activate self-isolation as per medical advice including use and distribution of PPE. • Specific bathroom usage may be able to be restricted to the child or young person with symptoms. Refer to Queensland Health website for specific measures to take if you are self-isolating a person suspected of having the virus. • Limit contact with other children and young people – consider other ways to support children and young people to remain in contact with their friends and family such as Skype, FaceTime and Zoom.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child or young person in residential care becomes ill 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family contact – update family members about any measures the residential care service is taking to ensure the ongoing health of children and young people and discuss with the department how ongoing family contact should be supported (e.g. Skype, FaceTime and Zoom) • Engagement with Community Visitors – contact the Office of the Public Guardian to discuss appropriate options for ongoing engagement. • Plan for management of stress and trauma related behaviours that may surface and diversionary approaches to ensure calm recovery spaces and reduce anxiety. • Prepare activities to keep children and young people occupied and engaged to reduce the temptation for young people to leave the residential care service. • Activate plan for considered staff rostering to reduce potential for cross-infection and maximise availability of staff going forward. • Access relief staff as required. Is it possible to share residential care staff across services? • Consider all steps of Business Continuity Plan and determine what needs to be implemented now. Continue to revisit as needed.
<p>Client tests positive to Covid-19</p> <p>QUARANTINE</p> <p>Consider scenarios:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child or young person tests positive for virus • Staff member who has had contact with clients tests positive. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow all health authority and medical advice regarding hospitalisation, quarantine or self-isolation. • Track and record details of all persons with whom the infected child or young person or staff member has come in contact. This will be critical information for health authorities as well as for your service and staff. • Liaise with health authorities as required. Children and young people’s safety must remain a priority – the health authorities must be informed of any risk and safety concerns for individual clients (e.g. disability, mental health, trauma behaviours). • Follow health authority protocols for reporting of event and infection control measures. • Ensure departmental critical incident reporting requirements are implemented. • Notify department of organisational arrangements being implemented in response to positive diagnosis. • Work with Placement Services Unit on alternative care arrangements for other children and young people, if required.
<p>SERVICE PARTIAL OR FULL CLOSURE</p> <p>Consider scenarios:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is essential that service delivery be maintained to ensure children and young people have appropriate placement options. • Safety of children and young people and staff are critical.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-isolation or quarantine measures have not been successful • All staff are not able to work and relief arrangements can no longer continue service delivery. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To ensure maximum service availability is maintained, collaborative planning with other residential care services may be required. Keep informed of any changes to service delivery from other services and make sure they know how you are operating. • Advise the Department of Child Safety, Youth & Women (including relevant Child Safety Service Centres and Placement Services) before partial or full service closure steps are implemented. • Report health concerns as per health authority protocols. • Follow directions of health authorities for accessing medical attention to quarantined children and young people.
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COVID-19 RESOURCE LINKS:

This is only a selection – access others from trusted sites as they become available.

Learning@Home

- The Department of Education has a number of online tools and resources to support students. The resources provided on Learning@Home are a sample of activities that can be printed and are designed as a support tool for students to continue their learning and engage in familiar activities essential to their learning and wellbeing – <https://education.qld.gov.au/curriculum/learning-at-home>
- Additional online resources are available for Queensland state school students through the Learning Place website using student log in. This is the same logon and password that students use to log onto the computers in their classrooms.

“Talking to children” Resources from Peakcare Website:

Click on the following links to review the materials and select the approaches that will be of most benefit to the children and young people in your care:

- [How to talk to your child about coronavirus disease 2019 \(COVID-19\): 8 tips to help comfort and protect children](#), a resource developed by UNICEF targeted to parents

- [How teachers can talk to children about coronavirus disease 2019 \(COVID-19\): Tips for having age appropriate discussions to reassure and protect children](#), a resource also developed by UNICEF targeted to teachers, but which can be easily adapted for use by other professional groups
- [Talking with children about Coronavirus Disease 2019: Messages for parents, school staff, and others working with children](#), a useful description of the principles to be observed by a wide range of adults when talking with children and young people, produced by the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- [Talking to Children About Coronavirus \(COVID19\)](#), that contains more useful advice from the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
- [Talking to Children about COVID-19 \(Coronavirus\): A Parent Resource](#) produced by the United States National Association of School Psychologists, with links included to other useful resources
- [Tips for Families: Coronavirus](#) produced by Zero to Three's with advice and resources specifically targeted to children aged 3 or below
- Don't like reading? Then go the [Child Mind Institute website](#), watch the [Talking to Kids about the Coronavirus](#) video and share the link with others.

Mental Health Support

- Beyond Blue is building a dedicated COVID-19 Mental Health Support Service. The service will offer free counselling by mental health professionals for all people in Australia 24/7, both online and over the phone. It will also provide free and easily accessible information and advice around coping with COVID-19, isolation and connection, workplace and financial hardship, and how best to support the mental health of loved ones. <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/the-facts/looking-after-your-mental-health-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak>
- Information is for young people affected by stress related to Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) <https://headspace.org.au/young-people/how-to-cope-with-stress-related-to-covid-19/>
- Lifeline <https://www.lifeline.org.au/get-help/topics/mental-health-and-wellbeing-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak>
- Kids Helpline <https://kidshelpline.com.au/coronavirus>

Birdie and the Big Sickness

This resource is a part of a series of story books on natural disasters that have been developed by Community Youth Mental Health Services. It can be found on this link <https://www.childrens.health.qld.gov.au/chq/our-services/mental-health-services/qcpimh/natural-disaster-resources/storybooks/>

Online Safety Resources

- COVID-19: an online safety kit for parents and carers – <https://www.esafety.gov.au/about-us/blog/covid-19-online-safety-kit-parents-and-carers>
- Be Connected is an Australia wide initiative empowering all Australians to thrive in a digital world – <https://beconnected.esafety.gov.au/>

Other Websites, articles and factsheets:

- Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne - Supporting children and young people to cope with the coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic https://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Supporting_children_and_young_people_to_cope_with_the_coronavirus_COVID-19_pandemic/
- National Child Traumatic Stress Network has a number of factsheets including simple activities for children and adolescents and information for parents and caregivers <https://www.nctsn.org/>
- Child Mind Institute – Supporting Teenagers and Young Adults During the Coronavirus Crisis <https://childmind.org/article/supporting-teenagers-and-young-adults-during-the-coronavirus-crisis/>
- The Growing Space has developed easy read resources to help protect people with disabilities and their families <https://www.thegrowingspace.com.au/covid19/>