

Alfred Health Response:

Parliament of Victoria
Pandemic Declaration Accountability and Oversight
Committee

Restrictions on hospital visitation under Pandemic Orders
Questionnaire

May 2022

Questionnaire Response

1. Has your organisation implemented visitor restrictions that are in excess of the restrictions detailed in the orders? If so, when did this occur and in what circumstances?

Pandemic orders 1-5 commenced 15 December 2021 and extended through to 12 July 2022.

Alfred Health established a safe and essential visitor guide in April 2020 in line with the state of emergency hospital visitor directions.

Alfred Health's approach was to allow visiting only for End of Life or in special circumstances.

The significant issue for Alfred Health is the requirement to maintain social distancing and density limits which is in line with pandemic requirements and COVID safe plans but not specifically detailed in the pandemic hospital visiting orders. The old infrastructure and shared rooms have made compliance with density levels a significant issue for Alfred Health.

Alfred Health introduced mandatory vaccination for visitors earlier than the pandemic orders outlined this requirement in line with expectations of workers.

2. Has your organisation received any complaints about visitors' restrictions? If so, what were the outcomes of these?

Alfred Health has received feedback including complaints in relation to visitor access. Complaints have been managed in line with our complaints process and outcomes have varied depending on the circumstances but have included:

- Outcomes to specific complaints include – direct feedback to the complainant/source of complaint, feedback to local area for response and consideration of any possible improvements.
- Regular revision of our website and patient information to improve clarity of messaging.
- Regular and frequent revision and amendment to our guideline to improve clarity and information for staff managing the visitor access at local levels.
- Introduction of increased support (admin) at the ward level to support contact with relatives and carers and improve responsiveness to phone enquiries.
- Purchase and development of software solutions to support a booking system for visitor access to assist in density management and social distancing, in particular in 4 bed wards. The booking system allows nominated visitors to book into a designated time which ensures not all permitted visits are occurring at the same time in any given area.
- The Alfred Health guideline includes an escalation process for unresolved visitor access issues through to the Chief Nursing Officer.

3. Have there been instances where your organisation has misinterpreted the restrictions under the orders (eg. when orders have changed or through confusing language in the content of the orders)?

No, but would suggest that from time to time the guidance has required Alfred Health to seek further informal clarification, or state its specific interpretation of a matter of guidance.

4. How many applications for visitor exemptions has your organisation received and how many have been approved.

Applications for visitor exemptions that do not meet the guideline are managed at the local level and there is no record of how often visitor requests outside the guideline have been made as they would not have been approved.

In relation to the excluded persons since the pandemic orders have been in place. Alfred Health has made approximately six requests of the Chief Health Officer (or delegate) to approve visitor access for an excluded person to visit at End of Life. All these requests have been approved by the Chief Nursing Officer and Department of Health in a timely way. Records of non-approvals have not been retained.

5. What staff member of your organisation has assessed applications for exemptions.

The Chief Nursing Officer or delegated on call Executive Director.

6. What steps were taken to inform all visitors and their relatives of the visiting rules and the capacity to apply for an exemption.

- Specific page on the Alfred Health website – with access from main page outlining visitor restrictions and process.
- Links to information guide for family and visitors.
- Instructions to discuss with Nurse Manager at local level.
- Entry point screen stations – briefed and aware of visitor restrictions.

7. What steps were taken to advise staff of the availability of the exemption process when dealing with the public and visitors to patients?

- Development of the Alfred Health COVID-19 safe and essential visitor guideline.
- Briefing of Nurse Managers and Entry point screening staff on guideline and changes.
- Briefing at the COVID operations meetings on changes.
- Notification to all staff via the Alfred Health internal website on any visitor related changes.
- The guideline has specific details on escalation for approval and exemptions included.
- At times Alfred Health's approach has been to escalate any visitor entry to the Service/Operations Director level for consistency of approach with exemptions escalated to the Chief Nursing Officer.

8. What was your overall impression of the system and could it have been improved

- The language in the orders could be vague and open to a range of interpretation.
- Clarity or reference to the requirements of COVID safe plans to maintain density levels would have been helpful.
- Changes and updates often released late in the week (Friday) which put significant strain on Health Services to remain compliant and change guidelines/websites/inform staff and change systems in order to comply.