



**MACQUARIE**  
University

# Safe visiting at care homes during COVID-19: Australian perspective

1 February 2021

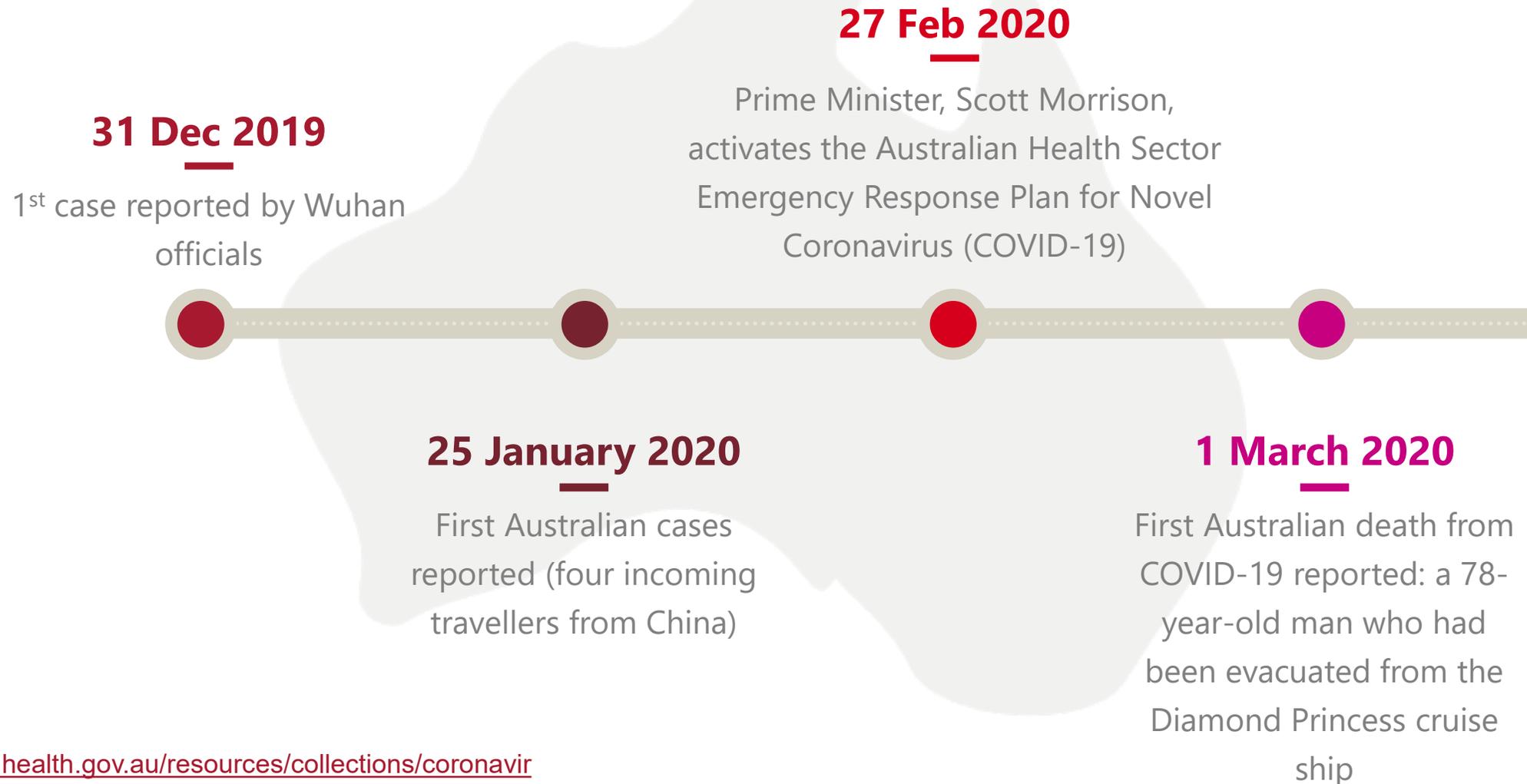
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# Australia Timeline



Source:

<https://www.health.gov.au/resources/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-at-a-glance-infographic-collection>



## Mid-late March 2020

On the 18th March 2020, the Federal Government declared a human biosecurity emergency and issued directives that allowed but **restricted visitors to care homes:**

- Visits limited to one visit per day, with a maximum of two visitors per visit
- Visits to take place in resident's room, or in outdoor areas
- Visits to be kept brief
- Children aged 16 and under are discouraged from visiting
- Do not visit if sick or have respiratory problems
- Do not visit if have not had influenza vaccine

## Early April 2020

6,753 cases, 91 deaths

Case numbers begin falling

## 8 May 2020

Gov announces three-stage plan to begin easing lockdown restrictions

Restricted family visits permitted

## 20 June 2020

Restrictions reinstated in Victoria as new COVID clusters in an apparent 'second wave' are recorded



**30 June 2020**

7,834 cases, 104 deaths  
Victorian Premier imposes  
local lockdowns

**12 August 2020**

22,127 cases, 352 deaths

Blanket bans  
reinstated

**2 August 2020**

State of disaster declared  
Nightly curfew  
Mandatory face coverings

**19 October 2020**

Restrictions significantly  
eased, with further easing  
on 27 October as case  
numbers dwindle



## 26 October 2020

Victoria records zero new cases and deaths for the first time since 9 June

## 16 November 2020

A small outbreak of cases in South Australia, leads to re-impositions of restrictions and lockdown in that state The outbreak is quickly controlled and restrictions end on 21 November

## 1 November 2020

Australia records zero locally acquired COVID cases for the first time since 9 June

The Australian Government extended mental health support for aged care residents.

## 18-31 December 2020

Northern Beaches cluster, reimposed restrictions

28,381 cases, 909 deaths.  
*Victoria, with 20,365 cases, 820 deaths,  
NSW with 4,906 cases, 54 deaths*

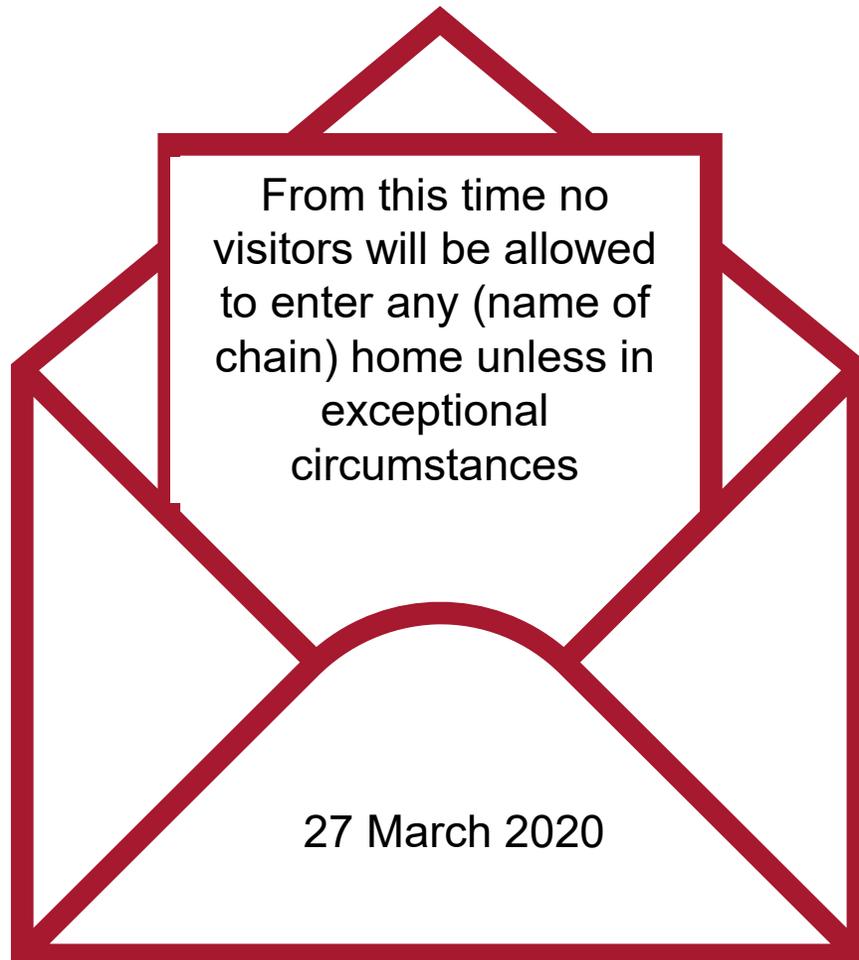
# »»»» Now

- Facilities:
  - Continue to postpone large group visits and external excursions.
  - Permit gatherings of residents in communal or outdoor areas.
  - Permit residents to leave the facility to attend small family gatherings.
  - Help residents stay connected with family and friends by phone and video calls.
- Spouses, other close relatives and social supports (including children) can visit. There is no limit to the number of hours they spend with their spouse/relative.



# Case Study

BY BRIONY DOW



*On the 18th March 2020, the Federal Government declared a human biosecurity emergency and issued directives that **allowed but restricted visitors to care homes***

As a family member, I could not visit my mother at all.

This letter felt like it was punishing families for previous wrongdoing, it further stated:

*“Over the week it has become apparent that our initial partial restrictions are not managing the risk of infection spread. Some visitors have been unwilling to comply with our requests and at times have been disrespectful and abusive to staff...”*

# Case Study

BY BRIONY DOW

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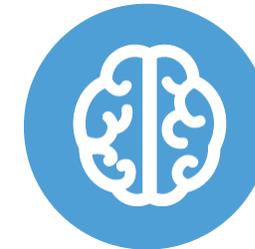
*I was able to visit my Mum after three months of restrictions. My Mum was especially glad to see me and it was good to visit every day for a fortnight.*

# Impact

## WELLBEING

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- Pre-COVID-19, people living in care homes commonly had symptoms of depression (reported as between 27% and 50%) and said they felt lonely (reported as between 35% and 40%) (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2013).
- Between 50-90% of residents have cognitive impairment or dementia (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2012).
- Care homes may have limited access to technology (Siette et al. 2020), and residents may have varying comfort with, and acceptance of, technology for communication.



# National Seniors COVID-19 Survey

## PRELIMINARY RESULTS: RESIDENTS' VOICES

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Unable to go out and all residents and units stayed at home. ... The virus stopped me living normally.

The isolation. I cannot ever remember being so lonely.

# Our thoughts

## WHAT'S YOURS?

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- Response from Australian Department of Health and aged care sector
  - Inadequate funding for additional staff to facilitate visits
- How to maintain quality of life?
- Some facilities acknowledged the success in keeping the virus out, but asked 'at what cost?'
- Importance of family and friend visits



# Core message

IS THIS NECESSARY?

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Repeated localised visitor bans in response to tiny 'outbreaks' when there are very low levels of community transmission

Impact of restrictions on residents and families, staff time and resources required to manage safe visiting and government support to fund safe visiting



# Thank you

 @JSIETTE

