



## Department of Health and Human Services

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Konstantin H Kontis  
Chairman  
St Basil's Homes for the Aged in Fawkner

Sent by email to [kon@kontis.com.au](mailto:kon@kontis.com.au)

Dear Mr Kontis

### **Outbreak of COVID-19 at St Basil's Home for the Aged in Fawkner**

I am writing to provide advice and direction from the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services (the department) in relation to the significant outbreak of COVID-19 at St Basil's Home for the Aged. I acknowledge the difficult and challenging issues arising for your staff, and for residents and families at St Basil's. I note the previous correspondence sent to you from Jackie Kearney from our department on 20 July 2020.

As of 21 July, the department is aware of at least 58 confirmed cases of COVID-19 at the facility, which includes 40 residents and 18 staff. We are aware that your facility has been working closely with the Commonwealth Government, the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission, and our department to enact critical public health control measures in a highly challenging environment.

This ongoing outbreak represents a significant and serious threat to public health, including the health and lives of residents and staff of St Basil's. Given the significant and extensive transmission of infection to date, the high case fatality rate of COVID-19 and the ease with which it can spread within the residential aged care facility and the community, it is essential that further immediate actions are taken to safeguard the health and wellbeing of residents, and the health – under occupational health and safety obligations - of staff.

The number of resident and staff cases indicates that there has been significant transmission within the facility. Based on an assessment by officers of the department, informed by the large numbers of cases and evidence of extensive transmission, the department advised on 19 July that **all staff who were present in clinical areas from 1 to 15 July (inclusive) for greater than 2 hours would be designated as close contacts**. Staff should commence their quarantine from their last date in the facility, during that date range. Staff members may return to work at the facility when they have returned a negative COVID-19 test and when they have completed 14 days of quarantine from their last day of work during the 1 to 15 July period.

In accordance with the *Diagnosed Persons and Close Contacts Directions (No.6)* issued by the department, close contacts identified by the department are required to remain at home and quarantine for 14 days from their exposure date and normally undertake testing for COVID-19 at day 11 (or later). Close contacts should provide evidence of a negative test result prior to returning to work. I note that this requirement is in place for the safety of all persons –



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residents, other staff and other Victorians. Close contacts who are found to not be quarantining appropriately may be subject to penalties.

Given the fact that all staff who have worked in the designated period of time have been classified as close contacts, I understand that the facility will require an alternative workforce to continue to operate. The department is working with the Commonwealth Department of Health and the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission to support this. This course of action has been taken in other aged care settings with widespread transmission among staff.

**Action required as soon as the replacement workforce is available**

All staff that met the criteria of close contact as described must now quarantine at home as directed. The department can organise for urgent infection prevention and control training and advice to be provided to staff that replace your workforce, so that there is careful management of the ongoing risk of further spread of infection including infection of any staff commencing work now.

Please advise urgently in writing by email to [publichealth.operations@dhhs.vic.gov.au](mailto:publichealth.operations@dhhs.vic.gov.au) the details (telephone number and address) of staff who were present in clinical areas of St Basil's from 1 to 15 July (inclusive) for greater than 2 hours, and then confirm that those staff have been advised they must go home and quarantine by close of business on Wednesday 22 July 2020 as part of a handover to an appropriate workforce. The department will be in contact with all staff at their homes for the purposes of explaining the consequences of being a close contact.

Please note that section 188 of the *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008* provides that I, as Chief Health Officer, may direct a person to provide information to me if I believe that the information is necessary to manage or control a risk to public health. It is an offence to refuse or fail to comply with such a direction, without reasonable excuse. You may refuse or fail to provide any information I have requested if providing the information will tend to incriminate you.

Please note that I am formally requesting you to provide the names and contact details (telephone number and address) of staff who were present in clinical areas of St Basil's from 1 to 15 July (inclusive) for greater than 2 hours in accordance with section 188 for the purposes of managing the risk to public health posed by COVID-19.

We are keen to continue working closely with you and your team to safely manage this outbreak.

Yours sincerely



**Adj Prof Brett Sutton**  
Chief Health Officer  
Department of Health and Human Services

21 / 7 / 2020