

CORONAVIRUS — AGED-CARE SECTOR

200. Mr M. HUGHES to the Minister for Seniors and Ageing:

I refer to the state government's response to COVID-19 and its impact on the aged-care sector. Can the minister update the house on the measures being taken to help protect residents in Western Australia's aged-care facilities?

Mr M.P. MURRAY replied:

I thank the member for the question. Based on what we know about COVID-19, seniors form one of the groups most at risk of serious infection, and we must take this very, very seriously. Following the Prime Minister's advice, a number of restrictions have been placed on visits to aged-care facilities. I can confirm that anyone who has been overseas or in contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19 within a fortnight will be banned from visiting aged-care centres and facilities. Anyone with a fever or symptoms such as respiratory infection, cough, sore throat, runny nose or shortness of breath will also come under the ban. After 1 May 2020, those who have not been vaccinated against influenza will also be prohibited from entering any of those facilities. Aged-care residents will be able to receive only one visit per day, with a maximum of two people visiting. Children under 17 years are advised to visit only by exception—sometimes there might be a moment in life that is the last chance for people to say something to someone; that would be the exception. Although I understand this can be distressing to some, commonsense must prevail. Visits should also be conducted in a resident's room, specifically designated area or outdoors to reduce any risk of potential transmission, and people should practice social distancing measures when possible. Measures such as phone and video calls may be made accessible to residents in those facilities to enable regular contact with family members and to prevent feelings of loneliness and isolation.

We will be using powers under the Public Health and Emergency Management Acts to enforce these new rules to protect Western Australia seniors. As the Premier said previously, penalties of up to \$50 000 will apply. Some aged-care providers have also taken additional precautions, with Regis Aged Care, for example, entering a lockdown and prohibiting any visitors for the next two weeks in all its facilities. However, allowance will be made in exceptional circumstances. I recommend visitors call ahead to check whether any further restrictions are in place in such facilities. Every Australian needs to be conscious of minimising the risk of transmission of COVID-19 to older Australians, who we know are in the group most at risk in this area. I urge community members to take some responsibility for the safety of seniors in their lives by strictly self-isolating if required in accordance with directives from the Department of Health and by adhering to the restrictions I read out earlier.

These timely and sensible measures are important mechanisms to protect our most vulnerable, and I thank everyone for their cooperation. As has been said, when we go back to our communities today, we need to emphasise to people that things are not normal and we have to take extreme measures to try to control the problem we have.

In finishing, I congratulate my local butcher, Spry's Meat Market, which has taken steps in my community to make sure seniors are able to buy meat without fear of missing out due to panic buying. I ask that similar businesses do the same.