

# COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

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## COVID-19 and Family Violence FAQs

### COVID-19 and Family Violence

#### How does a public health pandemic affect the occurrence of family violence?

Research demonstrates that family violence increases after emergency and natural disaster situations such as bushfires, earthquakes and hurricanes. Based on these experiences, we can anticipate that incidences of family violence will also increase during the widespread community outbreak of COVID-19.

Family violence advocates in China have already reported that family violence incidents have tripled for the month of February this year compared to February last year. Research into other natural disasters in Australia and overseas indicates increases in family violence could increase anywhere from 30% to 100%.

Research into experiences of family violence post the Black Saturday bushfires in Victoria, found that family violence increased due to a tendency for people to revert to strict gender norms during times of natural disaster and uncertainty such as men being the protectors and decision makers and women being the carers. These strict gender norms reduce women's autonomy and can put them and their children at risk. Research also found that women's experiences of violence tend to be dismissed or excused more often during times of disaster or emergency with statements such as "He is just stressed."

Other contributing factors that can increase the risk of family violence and are likely to be factors in the current situation with COVID-19 are increased financial insecurity, employment and housing insecurity and increased and sustained periods of time that families are together due to quarantine. Victim-survivors also may have a reduced ability to flee family violence during this time, as well as have reduced access to support and community supports if schools and community services are closed for containment reasons. In this environment, it is important that family violence services work with health services and police as key partners in identifying and responding to family violence.

It is important for anyone experiencing family violence to know that family violence is never ok, no matter the circumstances or situation.

#### How does COVID-19 interact with gender?

See the following news articles:

[COVID-19: the gendered impacts of the outbreak](#)

[The COVID-19 Outbreak and Gender: Key Advocacy Points from Asia and the Pacific](#)

[COVID-19 is not gender neutral](#)

[The coronavirus fallout may be worse for women than men. Here's why.](#)

#### How does COVID-19 affect women with disabilities?

Tailored responses for women with disabilities experiencing family violence are more important now than ever, as women will be in isolation with abusive family members and reliant on them for their care. Like other Victorians with disabilities, women with disabilities are concerned that the disability support workforce may be impacted by the pandemic, or that they may turn up unwell, or not follow good hygiene practices. COVID-19 also could impact state government workforces like the TAC, volunteer programs and other safeguarding programs like Office of the Public Advocate's Community Visitors. If women with disabilities cannot access their usual services, the few protective factors against their perpetrator may disappear.

For more on how COVID-19 affects people with disabilities please click [here](#).

## **Service Delivery - General**

### **How will Specialist Family Violence Services continue to deliver services to victim-survivors of family violence during the COVID-19 pandemic?**

DV Vic is working with Specialist Family Violence Services and with the Victorian Government to develop state-wide, systemic guidelines on continuity of service and scaling service delivery in response to reduced availability of staff. We are encouraging services to continue to work with their local networks and partnerships to plan for service delivery continuity and referrals across sectors. The aim is for service provision to be as close to business as usual as possible.

### **How might services change during COVID-19?**

The introduction of social distancing and isolation measures will see a change in the way services are delivered and may include the use of more phone and online services and limiting the amount of face-to-face contact with clients. We will keep this site updated with any changes to the family violence response system.

DV Vic is working with Specialist Family Violence Services to develop a resource bank on good practices as victim-survivors are potentially at greater risk due to possible isolation and quarantine with people using violence against them, and which will impact on services being able to meet with victim-survivors face-to-face.

We reiterate that even though the mode of service delivery may change, specialist family violence services will continue to provide support to victim-survivors.

### **Will Specialist Family Violence Services be screening clients for COVID-19?**

Yes. Importantly, screening victim-survivors does not affect if they receive a service. However, it will affect how services are provided and help agencies protect their staff, so they are able to continue to provide support to others.

We are working with specialist family violence services to incorporate possible impact of COVID-19 into risk assessments and safety planning with clients now. Services will also be working with Victoria Police and other partner agencies at a local level to put strategies in place, particularly for high risk clients known to be in isolation/quarantine.

Please see the [DHHS website](#) for the most up to date information about COVID-19 and assessment tools.

### **What is the police response to family violence during the COVID-19 pandemic?**

Victoria Police have indicated that their family violence response will not change as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. They will continue to respond to family violence using a risk

management approach. Police have access to personal protective equipment and have been provided with information on how to respond to someone who has or may have the COVID-19 virus.

## **What is the court response to family violence during the COVID-19 pandemic?**

The Magistrate's Court of Victoria has issued the [following statement](#).

From the 29th of April 2020, Victorians experiencing increased family violence risk as a result of the the COVID-19 pandemic will have their urgent applications fast-tracked through the Family Courts and heard by a judge within 72 hours. You can [read more about this development here](#).

## **What can my service do for victim-survivors of family violence during the COVID-19 pandemic?**

During the pandemic, victim-survivors who are in self-isolation and quarantine will come into contact with services who will have an opportunity to assess and respond to family violence risk. This may be you and your service. Until now, your service may not have thought about their role in responding to family violence and may still be learning about your responsibilities under the MARAM Framework and Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme. It is important that all services coming into contact with people in self-isolation or quarantine are equipped to identify and assess family violence and know how to share information and refer victim-survivors to specialist support services. For more information about the MARAM Framework and Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme, please refer to the [resources and information available](#).

## **How can my service best support LGBTIQ victim-survivors during COVID-19?**

Members of the LGBTIQ community who are also victim survivors of family violence may be uniquely affected by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, facing additional risks to their safety and barriers to help and support.

Rainbow Health Victoria has developed a tip sheet to help all professionals provide safe and inclusive services to LGBTIQ clients during the course of this pandemic. The tip sheet can be found on the [Rainbow Health Victoria website](#).

## **How can my service best support women from refugee and migrant communities during COVID-19?**

[inTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence](#) are continuing to support women from refugee and migrant communities during this public health crisis, providing support services over the phone and via video conferencing.

Additionally, inTouch have developed [a COVID-19 information hub on their website](#) where you can find:

- information on how inTouch is providing services during COVID-19
- online client referral and secondary consultation request forms
- a collection of translated COVID-19 resources in over 60 languages
- information on government and community services and support available to at-risk communities.

## **What steps can you take to support children during COVID-19?**

In the context of the COVID-19 public health crisis, child welfare organisations must continue to prioritise family violence screening, risk assessment and management.

They must also take additional steps to ensure these processes remain child-safe. To help your organisation achieve this, the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare has developed a [tip sheet](#) on safely conducting risk assessments with children while working online or remotely.

Further [advice and information for child and family welfare organisations](#) can be found on The Safe & Together Institute's website. The Institute has also developed a series of [resources](#) to support you with virtual home visits, supervision or case discussions during COVID-19.

## **Service Delivery - Refuge or crisis accommodation**

Please see [official advice from the Department of Health and Human Services regarding self-isolation](#) for clients.

There are particular challenges to the provision of refuge and crisis accommodation during the public health emergency and DV Vic will continue to seek advice from FSV, DHHS and public health officials regarding procedures for isolation in family violence refuges and other crisis accommodation. Information will be updated regularly as more information is available. In the meantime, anyone with family violence risk-related crisis accommodation needs should continue to be directed to [Safe Steps](#), who will continue to provide services throughout the COVID-19 epidemic.

## **Operational and administration issues**

### **Working remotely - How to communicate with clients confidentially and safely?**

As many organisations transition to 'working from home' arrangements for staff, it is vital to consider how this will change the way staff communicate with clients and the impact on staff who may be working from home in isolation for some time.

[WESNET](#) have a range of tips and resources regarding using technology safely to communicate with victim-survivors of family violence and [resources to assist family violence organisations to set up for working remotely](#) during the COVID-19 pandemic. Whilst these resources have been designed for family violence organisations, aspects may be applicable to a broader range of organisations who may be communicating with victim-survivors under working from home arrangements.

WESNET also provides the following resources:

- [Using Technology to Communicate with Survivors During a Public Health Crisis](#)
- [Best practices when using Mobile Devices for service delivery](#).
- [How to operate as a remote workplace during a public health crisis](#)

Many of WESNET's resources draw on those developed by the [National Network to End Domestic Violence \(NNEDV\)](#) in the United States. NNEDV also provide a [Digital Services Toolkit](#).

Justice Connect is also offering [tailored legal advice for services](#) including information on client safety, securing data with increasingly remote workforces, and managing cancelled public events.

Organisations should also review and update staff well-being and vicarious trauma mitigation strategies to ensure these are responsive to staff working from home for prolonged periods, and ensure staff know what support is available and going to be provided to them while they are working from home and in greater isolation from the normal team environment.

## **Practice with victim-survivors who are isolated and/or in quarantine**

DV Vic is working with Specialist Family Violence Services to develop a resource bank on good practices in this area as victim-survivors are potentially at greater risk due to possible isolation and quarantine with people using violence against them. DV Vic will make these resources available to SFVS as they are developed.

DV Vic has also developed a frequently asked questions resource [for victim-survivors and their family and friends](#). These resources can be found [here](#).

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