

## **COVID-19 and Strata Living NSW (updated 20 March 2020)**

Strata committees and associations have an obligation to make good faith decisions in the best interests of their members, but we are in uncharted water when it comes to the novel coronavirus. The COVID-19 virus has been declared a public health emergency. \* The symptoms range from a mild cough, sore throat and runny nose to breathlessness and pneumonia. Some people recover easily, others may get very sick very quickly. The COVID-19 virus spreads from person to person. A person may have the virus but show no or very minor symptoms.

To reduce the risk of spread of the virus many people will be asked to work from home. There will also be an increased number of people at home in mandatory 'self-isolation' under Public Health restrictions. From 16/03/2020 this includes everyone returning home from overseas. There will be time when some or all schools may close.

We must not underestimate the severity of this threat to the health of the community. To reduce the spread of the virus we all must practise good hygiene.

### **Good Hygiene Practice**

- wash your hands often with soap and water, and do not touch your face
- use a tissue and cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze, or cough into your elbow
- avoid contact with others, such as shaking hands, hugging, or kissing

### **Residents' Communal Facilities**

- shower before and after using a swimming pool and do not sit around on wet surfaces
- advice is that you should not use a spa or sauna due to the hot damp conditions
- use sanitised wipes or spray and wipe down gym equipment before and after use
- wash your hands or use sanitiser before and after using a piece of equipment
- wipe your face with a sanitised wipe or your personal towel, not your hands

*Hand sanitiser must be alcohol based (60%) to be effective. If you have any symptoms, have been diagnosed with COVID-19, awaiting results or during any period of 'self-isolation' do NOT use facilities such as the pool, gym, sauna, spa, tennis court, office, or meeting rooms.*

### **Social Distancing**

- where possible attempt to keep a distance of 1.5 metres between yourself and others
- avoid crowds and mass gatherings where it is difficult to keep the appropriate distance
- avoid small gatherings in enclosed spaces, for example family celebrations, meetings
- avoid visiting vulnerable people, such as those in aged care facilities or hospitals, infants, or people with compromised immune systems due to illness or medical treatment

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### Special Restrictions - Self Isolation for 14 Days

- Foreign nationals from mainland China, Iran, Republic of Korea and Italy are not able to enter Australia within 14 days of being in these countries, with the exception of permanent residents, immediate family members of Australians, and airline crew. If you left or transited through mainland China or Iran, Republic of Korea (effective 05/03) or Italy (effective 11/03), you must isolate yourself at home for 14 days on return.
- From midnight 15/03 all international arrivals, namely, everyone entering Australia from any country (including Australians) must self-isolate for 14 days.
- If you have been in close contact with a proven case of COVID-19, you must isolate yourself for 14 days from the date of last contact with the confirmed case.
- During 'self-isolation' don't go to public places, including work, school, childcare, university or public gatherings. In residential strata schemes, this includes the shared communal facilities such as meeting rooms, the gym, spa, sauna or pool. If you live in an apartment, you can go onto your balcony. If you must leave home, wear a surgical mask. You must take care not to cough or sneeze on others and should move quickly through any common areas. \*\*

**Let your strata committee or your strata managing agent/building manager know immediately if you are in 'self-isolation' due to a confirmed diagnosis or other 'self-isolation' restriction outlined above. This will ensure that hygiene protocols are in place on common property.**

### Strata Committees and Associations

The COVID-19 pandemic has escalated. The strata and building management industries are taking precautions to protect their staff, which may lead to some reduction in service.

Our strata communities are diverse. Our environment is one of close proximity and shared facilities. While some people may experience minor symptoms, the virus can affect anyone, and people with a compromised immune system or pre-existing condition are especially vulnerable. We are also home to doctors, nurses, teachers and other essential workers.

It is time for strata committees and associations to:

- if legally possible, postpone face to face committee meetings, annual general meetings, and community events. Conduct meetings in writing or via electronic means, if permitted
- enable strata managers to attend meetings via video or telephone conference call
- take precautions with best practice cleaning\*\*\*, paying attention to high-use areas, lifts, handrails, door handles, garbage chutes, gym equipment, change rooms, office desks and counters. If possible, provide hand sanitiser (60% alcohol) at the entrance/s to your building
- require commercial providers and contractors coming into apartment buildings to take extra hygiene precautions
- be clear about their legal obligations and their strata insurance and public liability insurance cover
- communicate clearly with residents and be sure to include tenants – there are fact sheets and hygiene education posters available online (see below).

Your scheme may need to temporarily close some facilities until the danger has passed. Committees and Associations should consult their strata lawyer, strata managing agent, and public health professionals when making decisions. Remember, the responsibility for ourselves and our apartment communities rests with all of us. Be a good neighbour, wash your hands and, where possible, assist those who need assistance.

OCN is aware that some “Airbnb Hosts” are now selling “14 days” stays for people who need to be quarantined at home and people returning from overseas are booking “Airbnb apartments” in residential strata schemes instead of going home to their own family. This is a dangerous development. OCN has written to the NSW Premier, Minister for Health, and Minister for Better Regulation and Innovation and asked for their intervention to stop this practice.

## Useful Links

Coronavirus and strata schemes:

<https://allisonbensoau.com/2020/03/13/coronavirus-covid-19-and-nsw-strata-schemes/>

Holding strata meetings podcast:

<https://yourstrataproperty.com.au/special-episode-coronavirus-can-we-avoid-in-person-strata-meetings/>

NSW Department of Health Frequently Asked Questions:

<https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/alerts/Pages/coronavirus-fags.aspx#1-4>

Federal Government Health Alert, Fact sheets and Posters:

<https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert>

\*The COVID 19 virus is a notifiable disease under the *Public Health Act 2010* (NSW). Penalties for not complying with ‘self-isolation’ requirements. \*\*Federal Dept of Health Fact Sheet ‘Self Isolation’. Version 11 (11/03/2020). (see also Information for close contacts of confirmed case Version 6 (14.03.2020) \*\*\* Federal Dept of Health Environmental Cleaning and Disinfection Principles for COVID 10 (Version 1 10/03/2020).

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