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Hundreds of Aged Care Homes Battle COVID-19 Outbreaks as Vaccination Urgency Grows

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Over 240 Australian aged care facilities are currently managing active COVID-19 outbreaks, sparking urgent calls for increased vaccination coverage to protect vulnerable elderly residents. This article examines the recent surge in infections, the high toll on aged care populations, and concerns over the adequacy of government and facility responses.

Since late May 2025, outbreaks in Residential Aged Care Facilities (RACFs) have risen markedly, peaking at over 300 facilities in late June. According to the Department of Health and Aged Care (DoHAC), 1,752 residents were infected and 34 deaths were recorded in a single week (ABC News, 22 July 2025). As of 11 July, 241 facilities were still reporting outbreaks, with 1,159 resident and 438 staff cases, and 138 resident deaths since early June.

Vaccination rates remain critically low. Just 30% of aged care residents had received a COVID-19 booster in the past six months, with some facilities reporting uptake as low as 10%, according to the Australian Immunisation Register (July 2025). Professor Raina MacIntyre of the University of New South Wales described the situation as “concerning,” particularly for dementia patients, where next-of-kin consent is often required for booster administration.

RACFs are especially vulnerable due to communal living arrangements and pre-existing health conditions. Outbreaks have shown a 45% attack rate and a fatality rate of up to 23% – significantly higher than the 6.5% fatality rate associated with influenza in aged care settings (PMC, 2023). Dr Anthony Marinucci, Chair of Aged Care at the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP), attributes the spike to seasonal waves, the emergence of new variants, and the relaxation of previous public health measures.

While the Department claims to be supporting facilities to lift booster rates, critics argue the reliance on Primary Health Networks has left major gaps in coverage, particularly in high-risk facilities (Medical Republic, January 2024).

Although cases have started to decline slightly, experts warn against complacency. The Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission has re-emphasised the use of antiviral treatments and strict infection control. However, without a concerted vaccination drive and stronger public health safeguards, thousands of elderly Australians remain at risk from a largely preventable disease.