



Coronavirus (Covid-19) Care Home Visiting Policy

Introduction

This policy revises the arrangements for visiting to care homes during the Covid-19 emergency in line with the Government and public health guidance issued on 21 September 2020.

The care home continues to apply its infection control measures fully in line with this latest Government and public health latest guidance in recognition of the fact that because care home residents are amongst the most at risk by virtue of their age and frailty to being seriously and possibly fatally ill if they are infected by the virus.

It understands that in line with Government advice its first priority must be to prevent infection and infection spread, which means that it must restrict visiting and seek alternatives wherever possible that help to maintain the contacts needed by residents with their families and friends.

It is also committed to making its visiting policy available and well communicated to its residents and families, so that they understand fully the reasons for any restrictions and arrangements and changes that might need to be made in line with local and national developments regarding Covid-19.

Definitions

The care home uses the same definition of “visitor” as in its main policy, i.e. someone who does not live or normally work on the premises as a paid staff member or accredited volunteer and who comes to the home for a short period of time to see residents or staff.

For the purposes of this policy visitors include people who:

- visit residents on a personal or social basis regularly or occasionally, e.g. relatives, friends and others who come to see an individual resident
- provide professional services to residents such as GPs, community nurses, pharmacists, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, ministers of religion, social workers, advocates, hairdressers, opticians, etc
- deliver, provide, or supply goods and services that have been bought or commissioned by the home, staff or residents, including repairs and maintenance

- come to the home to see staff members for any reason
- visit the home on a professional or business basis, e.g. external managers, inspectors and other personnel from the employing organisation or similar who may not be coming specifically to see individual residents, but who may have some contact with them depending on the nature and purpose of their visit.

This policy applies mainly to relatives and friends of residents and others who might need to have direct contact with residents. With other visitors, the home will continue to apply all required infection control measures, including health and safety risk assessments. In these ways the home is committed to minimising and mitigating the risks of infection into, through and from the home.

Current Approach

The care home recognises that the guidance on visiting has been issued in stages in line with the severity of the threat caused by the Covid-19 outbreak. The continuing thread is that there still cannot be any regular open visiting for care home residents as stated in its usual Visiting and Visitors' Policy, which is in abeyance until the current emergency is over.

During this period the home has arranged for suitable alternative means of relatives and others who would normally be visiting for keeping in contact with residents and the home through, for example, telephone, messaging, social media, Facetime, Skype and Zoom. These methods are well established and will continue as options even after the lifting of the current visiting restrictions.

The home will continue to follow the *Care Provider Alliance Visitors Protocol* (published June 2020). This was produced because it was recognised that residents of care homes must have continuous and sustained contact with people who are significant to them in order to maintain their mental and physical wellbeing and to reduce the social isolation that result from the Covid-19 restrictions.

Amongst the arrangements, the home has been able to consider and apply are the following.

- *Window visits* where there is safe ground floor window access for both residents and their visitors and the relevant social distancing and PPE measures can be observed.
- *Garden or Outdoor Area* visits that can conform to physical distancing guidance with relevant PPE and infection management and hygiene measures, and safe access to the designated outdoor areas.
- *"Drive-through"* visits using the car parks and other suitable outdoor areas that would enable safe direct contact with relevant PPE measures and physical distancing rules applying.

These arrangements will continue wherever practical and in response to individual needs and circumstances.

Current Policy

The care home continues to adopt the current Government guidance (updated 21 September 2020), which allows structured visiting, which must be in line with local public health protocols and risk assessments. It will continue to explore, in relation to

individual needs, a variety of arrangements as described above with limited indoor visiting, which involves where possible a single constant visitor to a resident.

The care home recognises that its visiting policy and arrangements will be very much subject to local circumstances and will have to be adjusted to meet any changes in these. These changes include:

- the circumstances of the care home in terms of, for example, its location, resident needs, current staffing situation and its experiences with the Covid-19 outbreak
- the local circumstances of the Covid-19 epidemic, including past and current incidence and transmission risks.

Any arrangements made by the home will apply only when safe to do so, with the approval of the local Public Health authority and on the basis of what Government guidance refers to as “dynamic risk assessment”.

This has enabled the home to take its decisions on visiting by balancing the benefits to its residents (and reducing harm because of lack of visits) against the risks of increasing Covid-19 infections and their consequences to a vulnerable group of people.

The home recognises that decisions to allow visiting and under what circumstances will be made in line with local intelligence from testing on the community and of residents and staff, transmission risks in the local community and other information provided by the home, for example, through its Capacity Tracker updating.

When safe, the home will consider (or has already set up) visiting arrangements such as a dedicated indoor area, which can be accessed and used safely without risk to and from the other parts of the home. Any such arrangement will follow all public health guidance on:

- the numbers of visitors that can be allowed at any one time or over a period of time
- the number of visitors allowed for a particular resident — where possible this is restricted to one with preferably the same person (or persons if agreed) visiting each time
- how the home should support visitors to reduce the risks of their transmitting any infectivity to the care home and of being infected from their visits to the care home, including the wearing of face coverings, hand hygiene, etc
- the infection control measures required for the use of the visiting area, including the wearing of face-coverings and for access and exit
- the infection control measures to be taken by staff during visiting, including appropriate use of PPE.

Face Coverings

The home will follow current Government guidance about the use of face coverings to reduce risks when people meet in enclosed public spaces and will recommend that, subject to other risk factors, residents and visitors wear face coverings and continue to maintain physical distance when meeting indoors.

However, the home in consultation with its public health partners will always exercise discretion in instances where on the one hand residents are frightened or affected adversely by having to or seeing their visitors in face coverings and on the other hand,

visitors have reasonable grounds for not wearing them, which can be discussed at pre-visiting planning.

Where it has been agreed that face coverings should not be worn, all parties will be reminded of the importance of maintaining physical distancing and hand hygiene procedures.

Visiting Schedules

Under the present circumstances the home recognises that all visits will have to be pre-booked and with limited availability some order of priority might need to be established.

It will base its priorities on the following.

- the importance to the wellbeing of the individual to have a resumption or continuation of visits
- the degree of harm that might occur without any visits
- the risk factors that are involved including the vulnerability to infection for the person concerned
- the degree of compassion that is involved, e.g. if the person is receiving end of life care or is likely to be receiving it in the near future
- the importance of visiting to the person in the context of their overall care plans
- the effectiveness of the current contact or visiting arrangements in place.

The home will ensure that the visiting arrangements will be planned, including times, frequency, and duration, and agreed in consultation with residents and their families and with professionals involved in a person's welfare.

Each resident will have a visiting plan, which will set out the arrangements for that individual together with an agreement outlining people's responsibilities for the safe and successful conduct of the arranged visits.

All visitors will be asked to provide separately, using the slips or electronic tools available, their contact details in addition to the usual signing of the visitors' book, which is required on other grounds, in line with the Government's test and trace guidance. This information will be held for 21 days before being destroyed in line with data protection laws.

Mental Capacity

In making these arrangements the care home will observe the rights of residents who may lack the relevant mental capacity needed to make particular decisions about their needs for visits and visiting plans. It will make all such arrangements in line with individual needs by following best interests' decision — making as set out in the mental capacity laws, and where appropriate in consultation with their advocates or those with power of attorney.

Essential Purpose Visiting

The home considers that it is still important to maintain its essential visiting policy on in-home visits for the time being but with a more flexible approach in line with Government guidance on visiting on compassionate grounds. If you must visit outside of the regular visiting arrangements for an essential purpose such as being with someone

who is receiving end of life care we still ask you to check with the home beforehand to discuss the essential nature of the visit, its advisability and the safety issues in respect of residents and staff that should be addressed.

Visitors' Risk Assessments

When visiting our care home as an agreed "essential visitor" we will still ask you to:

- check with us before visiting that everything is in order
- check if you might have had any contact with anyone who might have been in contact with an infected person or someone carrying the virus and take a decision about visiting based on your assessment of any risks
- be extra careful about being in physical contact with the person you are visiting and other people whom you might meet by:
 - avoiding close contact with people, particularly if they are unwell
 - avoiding touching their eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands
 - keeping to designated areas of the building which we will inform you about
- carry out stringent hand hygiene practice by always washing your hands carefully before and after any contacts made — using the soap and hand sanitiser gels and paper towels provided
- help staff to carry out the procedures that have been put in place to keep everyone safe from the virus and its spread
- report and discuss with us any concerns you have about the health of the person whose welfare is your concern.

We are confident that with these precautions in place we will be able to keep our residents safe.

The home will update this visiting policy in the light of further developments and the easing of restrictions as the risk decrease. It will, however, return to a tightening- up if there are further cases of Covid-19 in the home or evidence of increased risk from community transmission that has been identified by local Public Health.

Staff Involvement and Training

All staff are made aware of the policy and of the changes made over time. They are also consulted in respect of individual risk assessments, decisions, and arrangements.

Signed:
Date:
Policy review date: