

5 questions for residents, families, friends and carers to ask

Finding the right Care Home can feel overwhelming at any time. The COVID-19 pandemic means that care homes have had to learn to do things differently, like every household in the country. The focus remains to provide high quality care, with residents needs and wellbeing at the centre of everything.

You need to know the extra measures a home has in place so that you can be reassured that the health and wellbeing of the person receiving care is top priority. This short guide is here to help you think about what you need to know and the questions you might ask on your own behalf, or for someone else you are acting for, when thinking about a choice of home during COVID-19.

1 What is life like in the home?

It's not always possible to visit the home and bedrooms before making a decision about moving in during COVID-19. However, there are other ways homes are helping potential residents to see what is on offer:

- ✓ All new residents have to go through 14 days of staying in their own room, away from other residents, when they first arrive. During this time a care team will be on hand to provide all the care and support that is needed. This care and support will include all health and personal needs. Some care homes are calling this a 'support bubble' of dedicated staff to help the resident settle in.
- ✓ Some homes do allow a pre-arranged visit and will supply PPE to the potential resident or family member to take a look around.
- ✓ Other homes are able to give a virtual tour using video links through their websites, or provide a photo gallery, a 'meet the team' and Latest News. You may also be able have information sent through the post if you prefer.
- ✓ You should be able to speak to a member of the home's senior team to answer any questions you have about life in the home.
- ✓ You can also look for reviews from residents and next of kin on websites such as www.carehome.co.uk or www.autumna.co.uk.

Once the 14 day isolation time is over, the home should want to make sure life for residents is as enjoyable and sociable as possible within the limitations that COVID-19 has placed on everyone. There are lots of creative and surprising ways that care homes have adopted to help support residents to enjoy life and stay connected to family and friends.

- ✓ Some homes have helped residents enjoy socially-distanced garden visits, or set up a 'visiting pod' in a conservatory to stay connected with family.
- ✓ Homes have also helped residents to stay connected through the technology of video calling, as well as more traditional ways like the telephone, letters and email.

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✓ Homes have arranged socially-distanced activities both inside and outdoors, which might include exercise classes, church services, hobby classes, music and dance, movies, baking, gardening and themed celebrations.

✓ Homes have also found ways to help residents look and feel their best by offering safely managed hairdressing appointments and relaxation sessions, as well as ensuring access to health professionals including foot-care specialists.

Here are some questions that may help you explore with the home what life is like for residents:

? How does the home support the resident during the 14-day isolation period? How is the 'support bubble' of care and support provided? How does the home help keep a person in touch with their loved ones?

? How does the home help the resident settle in during this period and feel at home? How does the home help them to enjoy the activities in the home and pursue their interests/hobbies?

? How do residents mix and enjoy life together, with the constraints COVID-19 has placed on everyone? Do residents mix in small, socially distanced groups?

? What sorts of wellbeing services and activities are available?

? Are there outdoor spaces or a garden that are easy for residents to visit?

2

How do you safely help residents maintain contact with friends and family?

The latest guidance is that the Local Authority sets the visiting guidance based on the level of infection in the area. Where visits can go ahead, the current recommendations are:

✓ Residents are limited to having the same family member or friend visit to limit the number of visitors to the home.

✓ The home's visiting policy should be clear and shared with residents and families.

✓ The home should keep a temporary record and contact details of all visitors, as well as current and previous residents and staff to support NHS Test and Trace.

✓ In the event of an outbreak in the home or locally, of COVID-19 or another infection, the home may need to stop visits to protect residents, staff and visitors.

Homes need to strike a balance between keeping people safe, whilst finding ways to help residents maintain vital relationships with family and friends. You might want to explore this in more detail:

? How do visits happen at the home? Ask the home how they run visits; from pre-booking, screening, signing in, personal protection for visitor and resident (face coverings or face masks), where can visits take place?

? What other ways are the home finding to help residents enjoy socially-distanced visits and activities and stay in touch with the world outside the home?

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What is the testing programme for the home?

The current recommendations that a home should follow are:

- ✓ All staff are tested regularly in the home.
- ✓ All residents are also tested for as long as they stay at the home
- ✓ If any member of staff or a resident tests positive for COVID-19 in the home, the home needs to have a plan in place to ensure residents and next of kin can expect open and honest communication, balancing the need to keep everyone fully informed about what is happening against the need to protect an individual's privacy.
- ✓ Before moving in, the home will need to explain to new residents when they will need a COVID-19 test. The care home will need to know the COVID status of all new residents. Some homes may ask the person to have a test before moving in: this will need to be done 1-2 days prior to moving in and the results must be shared with the home. Some homes may allow a person to move in, checking they have not been in close contact with anyone with covid-19 symptoms within the last 14 days, and the home will provide the test as soon as they can as part of the settling in process. All new residents will need to have 14 days of staying in their own room, away from other residents, when they arrive.

In addition, you might want to find out how the home is planning to make these new measures more comfortable for residents?

- ? What happens when the home tests residents? How is the process managed? What testing do new residents coming into the home need to have?

4 What about the use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)?

The guidance from Public Health England is that staff teams should wear full PPE.

- ✓ PPE in a care home usually consists of staff wearing a face mask, a disposable apron, gloves and sometimes a visor or other eye protection.
- ✓ The home should have full supplies of PPE to make sure staff teams are never without.
- ✓ There might be some activities that do not require staff to wear full PPE.

Seeing staff dressed in PPE might look a bit alarming for residents and visitors.

- ? How have residents reacted to seeing staff wearing PPE and in what ways have the home found that can give the reassurance needed?

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5 What health and hygiene measures are in place to stop the spread of COVID-19?

The guidance and new advice for care homes comes from a number of different places, including government and local authorities. The following are ways homes have been advised to help keep people safe:

- ✓ The home is kept thoroughly cleaned and regularly disinfected, paying close attention to frequently touched surfaces.
- ✓ Staff have been trained to recognise the signs and symptoms of COVID-19 so they can respond quickly if anyone is unwell.
- ✓ Staff receive regular training in Infection Control Measures and are following increased hygiene procedures.
- ✓ Staff understand the latest advice and the importance of excellent personal hygiene is reinforced.

If you have other more general questions about COVID-19, then some of the following links may be helpful:

- The government's COVID-19 advice page -
<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>
- NCF's COVID-19's advice and guidance within health and social care -
<https://www.nationalcareforum.org.uk/ncf-voice/covid-19-coronavirus/guidance-overview/>



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