

## Part One: Coronavirus response – care home visiting policy

### Summary

New guidance from government on visiting care homes during Covid-19 was issued on 1 December 2020 and replaces previous guidance on visiting policies for care homes. The guidance is here <https://bit.ly/3oA7BVR>

While putting visiting squarely at the centre of care home life, the new guidance acknowledges that welcoming people into care homes from the community brings infection risk, which is to be balanced against the importance of maintaining health, wellbeing and quality of life for residents. This is summarised as minimising risks wherever possible, regardless of tiers, to help family and friends spend time together.

One of the key messages from the new guidance is that each care manager (the registered manager) is responsible for setting visiting policy in each home. However, Friends of the Elderly has a charity-wide approach to visiting that supports managers to implement its visiting policy through individual dynamic risk assessments, taking into consideration the needs and wishes of individuals within their home and having regard to the advice of the local Director of Public Health (DPH).

**Once the dynamic risk assessment has been agreed, visitors can come into the care home if they test negative (on each visit), wear the right PPE, and follow all infection control measures. This can allow more meaningful visits.**

Our Covid-wise visiting protocol applies to all visits and is attached as **Appendix A**.

If there is a Covid-19 outbreak in a care home, visiting will have to stop until the outbreak is over. This is to protect vulnerable staff, visitors, and residents. There can be exceptions to this restriction only in exceptional circumstances such as end-of-life. An 'outbreak' is currently defined by Public Health England as being two or more cases among residents or staff members.

Government is distributing rapid (lateral flow) tests to care homes across the country to be used for visitors. Homes registered with the Care Quality Commission are due to receive these tests during December 2020 in sufficient quantities to test up to two constant (wherever possible) visitors per resident, twice a week, by Christmas.

While rapid testing can reduce the risks around visiting, it does not completely remove the risk of infection. In addition to testing, care homes must use robust infection prevention and control (IPC) measures.

When in the care home visitors must continue to wear the appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE), observe social distancing in general good hand hygiene, and follow any guidance the care home provides on physical contact with the person they are visiting.

Outdoor and screened visits are an option for visitors who have not been tested. This may also be preferred by some visitors if they are concerned about their own infection risk. Social distancing, PPE and good hand hygiene are still very important.

If testing is not available, indoor visits may be allowed in Tier 1 areas. Visits should be limited to a single constant visitor wherever possible, with a maximum of two constant visitors per resident. This means relying on social distancing, no physical contact, PPE and good hand hygiene.

Visiting in exceptional circumstances, such as end-of-life, should always be supported. Visitors must book visits with the care home in advance. Ad hoc visiting will not be permitted.

### **Outdoor visiting and 'screened' visits**

Friends of the Elderly acted in response to the previous visiting guidance issued by Government (5<sup>th</sup> November) by introducing facilities and protocols to enable:

- Outdoor gazebo visits in garden areas (when these are in operation)
- Outdoor window visits
- Visits in log cabins/ pods with fixed screens
- Indoor visiting rooms with floor to ceiling screens.

These visiting options will remain in place because they are the safest for visitors, staff, and residents alike. They also provide a fall-back option to allow visiting to continue in the event of future lockdown situations or subsequent waves of the pandemic.

These arrangements meet the new government guidance on outdoor visiting and screened visits to enable visits from visitors who have not been tested. Visitors will still need to make appointments for these screened visits.

The government guidance is silent on the age of visitors. The Charity therefore allows children of any age to visit for outdoor visits and screened visits. The number of children allowed per visit will need to be agreed in advance with the manager and children of any age will be subject to pre-visit screening assessments.

The new guidance does not mention visiting between tiers, other than an 'interim' arrangement for indoor visiting in Tier 1 (see below). The Charity cannot police the various national, regional and local rules regarding definitions of 'households', 'bubbles' and 'tiers'. We ask therefore that all visitors participating in outdoor visiting or 'screened' visiting adhere to the rules regarding tier levels, and associated restrictions that apply to them at the time of their visit.

Some readers of the new government visiting guidelines may interpret 'screened' visits as merely involving a portable screen.

All Friends of the Elderly care homes have a facility for visiting with floor-to-ceiling screens, providing a safe visiting environment, either in partitioned intern rooms or log cabins with external independent visitor access.

### **Indoor visiting supported by testing**

Testing is one way of reducing the risk of visiting a care home, but it does not mean that there is no longer any risk. Visitors must return a negative test before each visit.

### **Visitors testing negative**

If a visitor has a negative on-site Lateral Flow Device (LTF) Test, wears appropriate PPE, and follows other infection control measures, it may be possible for them to have physical contact with their loved one, such as providing personal care, holding hands and hugging, although contact should be limited to reduce the risk of transmission.

LFT devices are being provided by government to care homes during December for the purposes of testing two constant visitors per resident, twice a week. LFD results are taken from swabs with outcomes available in approximately 30 minutes at the point-of-test. Visitors will be tested on arrival, and the visit can only take place if the test result is negative.

Visitor numbers should be limited to a maximum of two constant visitors per resident wherever possible. This is to limit the overall number of visitors to the care home and/ or to the individual and reduce the consequent risk of disease transmission from multiple routes.

## **Visitors testing positive**

Any visitor who tests positive will be provided with a PCR (polymerase chain reaction) test kit and asked to perform the test on site and then isolate at home immediately avoiding public transport and wearing a face mask. Before the visitor leaves the care home, they will need to register the kit on-line using the 'testing yourself at home' instructions. After registration is complete, the care home will need to schedule a courier to pick up the test kit.

If the test comes back positive, the visitor's household must self-isolate. Contacts may also need to self-isolate in line with current government guidance.

## **Exceptional circumstances such as end-of-life**

Visits in exceptional circumstances such as end-of-life will always be supported and enabled. Families and residents should be supported to plan end-of-life visiting, with the assumption that visits are enabled in the final months and weeks of life – not just the final days and hours.

## **Infection control precautions and the wider care home environment**

In accordance with the new guidelines, each of our care homes will continue to develop and deliver its own robust practices, procedures and protocols for infection prevention and control throughout the home. Visitors will be provided with information to support them to comply with infection, prevention and control measures, including putting on and taking off personal protective equipment and practising good hand hygiene.

Face coverings will be expected to be worn by visitors taking part in outdoor visits.

Some residents, by nature of their care needs, may have difficulty accepting visitors wearing masks or a face covering. This will be risk assessed and use of alternative items of PPE considered to enable a meaningful visit to go ahead.

Visitors are reminded and provided facilities to wash their hands for 20 seconds or use hand sanitiser on entering and leaving the home, and to catch coughs and sneezes in tissues and clean their hands after disposal of the tissues.

Visitors should have no contact with other residents and minimal contact with care home staff (less than 15 minutes/ 2 metres). Where needed, conversations with staff can be arranged over the phone following an in-person visit.

All visitors will be screened for symptoms of acute respiratory infection before entering, including entering the home to be tested. No one who is currently experiencing, or first experienced, COVID-19 symptoms in the last 10 days, will be allowed to enter the care home premises; nor will anyone who is a household contact of a case or who has been advised to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace, or who is in a relevant quarantine period following return from travel.

Staff should discuss with visitors in advance any items they wish to bring with them, such as gifts. It will need to be something that can be easily cleaned by the care home to prevent cross-contamination, for example, a box of chocolates that could be sanitised with wipes. You may also bring food gifts in for the resident.

Our care homes will support NHS Test and Trace by keeping a temporary record (including address and phone number) of current and previous residents, staff and visitors (including the person/ people they interact with – for example if a person visits their loved one who is also visited by a Chaplain in the course of a visit), as well as keeping track of visitors and staff.

### **Communicating with families and visitors**

The key message from the new government guidance on visiting care homes is that all visitors have a very important role to play in keeping people safe by taking steps to reduce the risks of infection.

Visitors should follow the advice below on how to communicate wearing a face covering by;

- speaking clearly and loudly
- keeping eye contact
- not wearing hats or anything else that might conceal their face further
- wearing clothes or their hair in a way that a resident would more likely recognise.

Some residents might struggle at first to remember or recognise visitors. The Charity's care and support teams will try to prepare the resident for a visit, perhaps by looking at photographs of the person who is due to visit and talking to them about their relationship.

Other residents will have particular needs – for example, those who are unable to leave their rooms, those living with dementia, or those who may lack relevant mental capacity – which will make Covid-secure visits challenging. We will work with families and friends to consider the rights of residents who may lack the relevant mental capacity needed to make decisions.

We will not make blanket decisions for groups of people and will communicate as much as possible with families and friends to reach decisions according to relevant mental capacity, the Mental Capacity Act 2005, and Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS).

## Appendix A

### Covid-wise visiting protocol

#### All visits

The following rules apply:

- A maximum of two constant visitors will be agreed per resident.
- Visits to be scheduled in advance, through a booking system (phone and email). You cannot turn up unannounced.
- In line with test and trace guidance, a record must be maintained of each visitor as well as anyone they interact with, for example if a person visiting their loved one is also visited by a Chaplain in the course of the visit.
- Visitors should have no contact with other residents and minimal contact with care home staff. Where needed, conversations with staff can be arranged over the phone following an in-person visit.
- Social distancing between visitors, staff and other residents, must be maintained – during the visit, and around the care home buildings and grounds.
- Visitors must complete a visitor assessment form before being allowed to visit. Visitors' temperatures will be taken on arrival. No-one who is currently experiencing, or first experienced, COVID-19 symptoms in the last ten days can visit.
- Visitors must catch coughs and sneezes in tissue and clean their hands after disposal of the tissues.
- Gifts must be capable of being easily sanitised by care home staff to prevent cross-contamination. An example might be a box of chocolates, that can easily be sanitised; but not a bunch of flowers.
- Visitors to bring a mobile phone, if possible, to contact the care home on arrival.
- Dogs are permitted. They must be kept on a lead and always under strict control.
- No smoking permitted.
- Visitors can use their mobile phones to take photographs or videos of their loved one.
- Each visit will last 30 minutes, other than specific exceptions agreed in advance with the manager.
- Visitors must notify staff when the visit is over, either by using their mobile phone or call bell or pendant, as available.