

Coronavirus response – care home visiting policy

Part Two: Arrangements for visits out of care homes

Please use this guidance in relation to Christmas visiting 2020

Government guidance 'Arrangements for Visits out of Care Homes' was issued on 1st December 2020 and paints an onerous and rather complicated picture. The guidance is here <https://bit.ly/3oA7BVR> and sets out significant strictures and responsibilities especially for older people living in care homes, their families and care providers.

The guidance states that visits should only be considered for care home residents of working age, because of the significantly greater risks to older people. Care homes should, however, support visits out for older people in exceptional circumstances, such as to visit a friend or relative at the end of their life.

Residents, their families and care homes are asked to very carefully consider whether making visits out from the home is the best thing to do, or whether a visit at the care home would provide meaningful contact in a safer way.

Other key points made in this guidance include:

- Outward visits should happen only in agreement with the home and subject to individual and whole home risk assessments.
- Outward visits can happen in any tier – as long as the resident and whomever they spend time with on their visit adhere at all times to the local rules as set out in their tier system restrictions and any general Covid-19 guidance or regulations in place at the time of the visit. The care home in which the resident lives is considered one household for these purposes, and the resident should not form a bubble with another household (apart from Christmas time as described below).
- **Christmas Period** - 23rd to 27th December 2020, inclusive - the resident should only mix with people from one household (or a bubble that includes that household plus another that is already connected in a support bubble or childcare bubble). The resident should not become part of a 3-household Christmas bubble.
- All members of the household hosting the visit must have had a negative result from a Covid-19 test taken immediately preceding the visit. For instance, the test could be taken when the family go to the care home to collect the resident for the visit. Care homes can make use of the lateral flow (rapid test) devices that they will be supplied with, for these purposes.
- In the instance of a positive test result, for either a resident or visitor, they should immediately self-isolate and complete a PCR test which should be provided to them by the care home. (Once the test has been carried out it must be returned to the care home to be sent off for processing).
- The resident will be tested immediately before their visit out of the care home with a lateral flow device (LFD), if the result is positive, the visit should not go ahead and the resident must be immediately isolated and given a confirmatory PCR test

- During the course of the visit, the resident and those they are visiting are advised to maintain social distancing, wash hands regularly, let plenty of fresh air into rooms by opening windows and doors and consider wearing a face covering.
- Leading up to the visit others in the party should take steps to minimise the risk to the care home resident and others in the care home, recognising that introducing Covid-19 to a care home puts all those who live and work there at risk. For instance, they should minimise their potential exposure to Covid-19 by limiting the number of people they meet for 2 weeks prior to the visit out.
- When a resident returns to the care home following the visit, additional measures will need to be taken to protect other residents and care home staff from the risk of Covid-19 transmission. Specifically, **the resident will need to isolate for 14 days.** (The resident would be tested immediately on returning to the home using the LFD followed by the PCR test in line with weekly testing).
- If any members of the household bubble have symptoms of Covid-19 or test positive for Covid-19 during the visit, it is recommended that, where possible, the resident self-isolates in the visit setting. If this is not possible, the care home must be notified in advance of the resident returning so that the appropriate precautions can be taken. Ideally, the resident would not return to the care home for 10 days from first displaying any symptoms
- In the event of an outbreak in the care home, visits out will not be possible. If an outbreak happens while the resident is visiting out, then they will still be able to return to the home.
- The local Director of Public Health (DPH) and Director of Adult Social Services (DASS) have powers to restrict visits out, but the assumption is that outward visiting should be possible unless there is evidence to take a more restrictive approach in a particular care home.

The importance of individual risk assessments

Following on from a care home's overall approach to supporting visits, decisions about an individual resident's visit outside a care home should be taken by the Charity on an individual-by-individual basis with the resident's personal needs, wishes and circumstances considered. This has to be balanced against a consideration of the risk to others in the home, in the event that the resident becomes infected on their visit, and the ability of the home to isolate the resident on their return.

Regard should be given to the ethical framework for adult social care, and the wellbeing duty in Section 1 of the Care Act 2014, and all decisions should be taken in light of general legal obligations, such as those under the Equality Act 2010, Human Rights Act 1998, Mental Capacity Act (MCA) 2005 and the application of Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) during the pandemic.

Ahead of each person's visit a plan should be in place with the arrangements and risk mitigation agreed with the resident (or a best interest decision if the person lacks capacity). This should be linked to the care plan, with consideration given to:

- The nature of the planned visit - including the intended activities and location/s.
- The support needs of the resident during the visit.
- How the resident will be supported in practicing infection prevention and control, including social distancing.
- Transport for the visit, which should avoid exposing the resident to those outside the households they are visiting, for instance travelling by a family car or by private taxi.

It is therefore important that the resident and their family are involved in discussions throughout this process so that all parties can reach a decision which is clearly understood and communicated, especially where the visit is not possible due to increased risk to the resident, other residents in the care home and staff.

It is important that the family hosting the visit have given full consideration to the risks of taking their loved one out of the care home environment – in terms of infection risk for the resident, the family and potentially other vulnerable residents in the care home. It may be that a visit in the home is more appropriate and a better way of spending time together.

Visits will need to be planned in good time, to discourage last-minute requests which may be more difficult to prepare for and accommodate. All visitors must use the booking system to book ahead of the planned visit, and to discuss practical arrangements including testing.

Throughout the decision-making process, the Charity will share information with its staff so that responses to the resident and families are consistent and transparent, aimed at supporting relationships with families and avoiding distress to residents or their relatives and friends. Where necessary, social workers can be approached by the care home, residents, or family to support this conversation – to help resolve any issues or concerns, and to ensure independent professional support or oversight where required.