

Company Mission – to be the provider of outstanding care in a home from home environment

Coronavirus (Covid-19) Care Home Visiting Policy

Introduction

This policy revises the arrangements for visiting this care home from 17 May 2021, as a result of Government guidance linked to its roadmap for moving out of the whole country being in “lockdown”.

Definitions

The care home uses the same definition of “visitor” as in its main policy, ie 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, eg 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, eg 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, the appropriate use of PPE and regular testing. In these ways the home is committed to minimising and mitigating the risks of infection into, through and from the home.

Policy Statement

The home’s visiting policy will always be adapted to the changing conditions concerning the spread of Covid-19 and the associated Government policies and guidance. The current policy reflects Government guidance that took effect from 17 May 2021.

The home understands that any longer-term continuation of these arrangements will depend on how well the pandemic is being brought under control and the success of the vaccination programme.

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The home welcomes the Government's current position, which recognises that "visiting is a central part of care home life. It is crucially important for maintaining the health, wellbeing and quality of life of residents. Visiting is also vital for family and friends to maintain contact and lifelong relationships with their loved ones and contribute to their support and care".

The care home recognises that visiting must be made safe to all concerned and continues to apply its infection control measures fully in line with this latest Government and public health guidance.

It acknowledges that, despite the vaccination roll out, care home residents are still amongst the most at risk by virtue of their age and frailty to being seriously and possibly fatally ill if they fall ill with Covid-19; especially as the effectiveness of the vaccination programme in preventing transmission of the virus with new variants appearing and in preventing reinfection is still unknown.

The home is 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.

Approaches Taken During Restrictions

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 national restrictions to control the spread of Covid-19 are lifted.

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 has followed the Care Provider Alliance Visitors Protocol (revised February 2021) and the recommendations of such organisations as the Residents' and Relatives' Association, which have continued to stress the vital importance of sustained contact with families and friends to care home residents' health and wellbeing.

The Care Provider Alliance Visitors Protocol describes several visiting models e.g. window, garden and drive-through arrangements, as well as different forms of indoor visits. The home has used, and could continue to use, these alternative approaches depending on the further easing of restrictions enabling more regular indoor visiting.

The care home has and will continue to consider all these ideas to its situation and adopt any that are suitable, practical and are responsive to individual needs and circumstances. The home has also considered the practicality of suggestions put forward for safe visiting to take place in cold weather conditions, which can also be adapted for warmer weather. These have included the use of “pods” or “lodges” situated in the grounds or in a separate area of the home, use of floor to ceiling screens, awnings, gazebos and open sided marquees.

With any set of arrangements, the home will continue to have in place or be ready to put in place all essential safety measures to:

- keep physical distances between people of at least two metres (except with visiting arrangements supported by negative test results)
- ensure high quality infection prevention and control practices before, during and after each visit
- restrict the numbers of named visitors per resident to one at a time (who are preferably constant) until numbers can be increased to two; though by arrangement with the care home up to two visitors might be allowable with other types of visiting
- have separate single entry and exits for visitors with one-way systems and minimum contact with other than those involved in the individual visit
- ensure good ventilation in every visiting area
- supervise the arrangements to ensure all safety precautions are being followed
- use speakers or assisted hearing devices to reduce the amount and spread of droplets when having to talk loudly, (an issue that will also be factored into individual risk assessments).

Revised Visiting Policy (May 2021)

The care home continues to adopt the current Government guidance (updated 17 May 2021) by following these principles.

1. The care home welcomes the recognition that visits should be supported and enabled wherever it is safe to do so.
2. The home accepts that it is responsible for setting its own visiting policy and arrangements in line with national and local public health guidance.
3. It will do so based on a dynamic risk assessment taking into consideration the needs of individuals within their home and with regard to the advice of the local Director of Public Health (DPH) through their outbreak management team or group.
4. It will (as applicable):
 - a. continue its policy of “outdoor” visits adapted to the situation as indicated by the risk assessments, including those made using temporary facilities such as pods and gazebos, window visits and drive-throughs and its use of technology to facilitate contact between residents and their families and friends

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- b. introduce “indoor” visits by named visitors to pre-appointed areas that can be supported by prior LFT testing and/or visitors who have been vaccinated against Covid-19 (recommended in the Government guidance).
 - c. introduce the policy of “essential care givers” (as defined in Government guidance) where in exceptional circumstances close contact personal care can be provided from a close relative/person which is critical for the resident’s immediate health and wellbeing (not only to end-of-life care). The “essential care givers” will be supported to follow the same testing arrangements and the same PPE and infection control arrangements as care home staff. (See Section on [Testing Arrangements for Essential Care Givers.](#))
 - d. continue with its current approach of taking a flexible approach to visiting required compassionate grounds where a resident is receiving end-of-life care. (See section on [Essential Purpose Visiting.](#))
5. The home will ensure that all visits are conducted in a risk-managed way that considers the needs of our service users and the practicalities arising from the physical features and layout of the home.
 6. It will continue to assess the rights and needs of individual residents, particularly those with specific vulnerabilities as outlined in their care plans and will consider the importance of visits in promoting their health and wellbeing.
 7. Residents will be fully involved in the appointment of their “named visitors” as the numbers of permitted visitors increase and the arrangements for their visits.
 8. It will continue to make appropriate best interest decisions with the help of all involved in their care in respect of residents who lack mental capacity and who might be subject to deprivation of liberty authorisations and involving them as fully as possible.
 9. It will follow all Government and local public health guidance in respect of the arrangements needed to ensure safe visiting of residents whenever this takes place.
 10. It will always ensure safety is never compromised and will adopt Government and local public health advice on any form of visiting.

Implementation

The care home recognises that its current 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, and the prevalence of any SARS CoV-2 variants.

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 its “dynamic risk assessment”.

Its decisions will continue to be based on 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, including from SARS CoV-2 variants, and other information provided by the home, for example, through its Capacity Tracker updating.

When setting up any new visiting arrangements such as a dedicated indoor area, it will ensure that it 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 number of visitors that can be allowed at any one time or over a period of time — from 17 May these can be two at any one time with up to five different people
- 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 prior testing, 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.

Visiting Procedures, including Testing

The home will implement the following procedures:

- allow only the number of visitors at any time that are in line with Government and local public health guidance and will ensure they are tested on each visit and/or have been vaccinated
- ensure visitors are wearing the appropriate PPE and following standard infection control measures such as hand hygiene
- have a designated entrance or outside dry space for people to put on the necessary personal protective equipment (PPE) required for the testing procedures
- have a designated area for the testing to be carried out, which is away from the main visiting area, which can also be used while the tests are being processed
- ensure the designated area is well ventilated and complies with fire safety and other health and safety regulations and is robust enough to withstand repeated cleaning with chlorine-based agents
- ensure all physical distancing, face covering and hand hygiene requirements are followed prior to the testing results being available with hand sanitisers being readily available
- ensure all prospective visitors are made well aware of the requirement to be tested, the timescales involved, the need for their consent, what testing involves and the potential benefits to the visiting experience
- advise them of what would happen if they tested positive ie the visit would not go ahead, they would need a confirmatory PCR test, which the care home would carry out. If that was also positive they would need to follow Government guidance on self-isolating with other members of their households and the information fed into NHS test and trace

- have a designated visiting area that does not increase any risk to anyone else in the home and to which all safety measures can be applied.

Testing Arrangements for Essential Care Givers

The home will follow all Government guidance in relation to visitors defined as “essential care givers” as follows.

Visitors who might be engaged in personal care and support as designated “essential care-givers” will:

- take a rapid lateral flow test before every visit except in the circumstances below. This must include a minimum of two tests a week: one rapid lateral flow test on the same day as the PCR test, and one rapid lateral flow test three to four days later
- if the visitor is visiting less than twice a week, they will need to make arrangements with the care home to carry out the twice weekly testing. These rapid lateral flow tests must be done on site and visitors cannot self-test at home
- take a weekly PCR test and share the result with the home. Care homes should use their existing PCR stocks to test these visitors and these should be registered as “staff” tests using the care home unique organisation number (UON) and be returned via courier with other staff tests
- be subject to additional testing in line with care home staff should the care home be engaged in rapid response daily testing or outbreak testing
- visitors who have recently tested positive for Covid-19 should not be retested within 90 days unless they develop new symptoms. This means that some visitors will not need to be tested regularly because they will still fall into this 90-day window. These visitors should use the result of a positive PCR result to show that they are currently exempt from testing until the 90-day period is over
- once the 90-day period is over, visitors should then continue to be tested. They should still continue to follow all other relevant IPC measures throughout these 90 days, including maintaining good hand hygiene and wearing PPE.

Face Coverings and Physical Distancing

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.

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, but the visit is not supported by testing, all parties will be reminded of the importance of maintaining physical distancing and hand hygiene procedures, (which apply to everyone at all times).

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 and their expressed wishes.
- 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, eg 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 willingness of prospective visitors to go through the new testing procedures if and when adopted by the home.

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 after each visit before being destroyed in line with data protection laws.

Communicating with Residents, Families and Visitors

The home will follow Government guidance in respect of enabling visits to be conducted safely and successfully, including supporting visitors on how to prepare for a visit, including where testing is being used, and how to communicate if face coverings are required, for example:

- speaking clearly from a safe physical distance
- keeping eye contact
- not wearing hats or anything else that might conceal their face further

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- wearing clothing or their hair in a way that a resident is more likely to recognise
- providing reassurance to visitors, including that some people with dementia might struggle at first to remember or recognise them
- care home staff preparing 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.

The home accepts that the arrangements for each set of visits will vary and need to be highly individualised.

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.

However, it also recognises that people with dementia or without mental capacity for other reasons might also be the ones who will benefit most by the new visiting supported by testing approach from the closer contact that will be possible, and their needs given high priority.

Essential Purpose Visiting

The home considers that it is still important to maintain its essential visiting policy on in-home visits but with a 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.

The home will encourage all visitors to take advantage of local SARS CoV-2 testing facilities to provide reassurance that they are safe to visit, and the rapid testing arrangements that are being introduced.

Visitors' Risk Assessments

When visiting our care home as an agreed “essential or named visitor” we will still ask you to:

- check with us before visiting that everything is in order and that you do not have any symptoms for Covid-19
- 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
- sign a short disclaimer to this effect

- 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, particularly 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, the new rapid testing approach and local test and trace programmes.

Registered Manager: _____

Date: _____

References

- *Covid-19 Visitors Protocol* (revised February 2021), Care Providers Alliance, available on the [Care Providers Alliance website](#)

Guidance on Care Home Visiting (updated May 2021), available on [GOV.UK website](#)