

Update on care home visiting 16.12.2020

Dear Care Home Manager

We wrote to you on 02.12.2020 outlining changes to the national guidance around care home visiting. The national guidance made reference to using Lateral Flow Tests (LFT) to enable visiting indoors, in conjunction with other infection prevention measures such as PPE. The national guidance can be found here www.gov.uk/government/publications/visiting-care-homes-during-coronavirus/update-on-policies-for-visiting-arrangements-in-care-homes

Evidence on LFT use continues to emerge, there is no Covid-19 testing process that is fully accurate all of the time, therefore, it is important we mitigate risk of false negative results as much as possible, particularly in high risk environments such as care homes.

On this basis, all care homes in Wolverhampton received correspondence on 11 December outlining our local approach to use PCR tests in tandem with LFT. This is to strengthen protection from transmission of Covid-19 for staff and residents during care home visiting.

Care homes should instruct visitors to take a PCR test before they arrive for their LFT test, between 3-5 days before the visit and LFT test, so that they receive the PCR test result ahead of the visit. **If both tests are negative, only then should the visit take place in line with other infection prevention measures such as PPE, hand hygiene and social distancing.** The national guidance should be adhered to, if a visit is consented, after both a negative PCR and LFT. **The requirement for a PCR and LFT negative test should be repeated for every visit**

Further guidance on how you can do this operationally and how to access PCR tests for your visitors has been outlined in the correspondence sent to care homes on 11 December 2020.

It is important to remember that following the end of the second national lockdown on 02 December 2020, Wolverhampton, along with the rest of Black Country and Birmingham area, was placed into Tier 3 'Very High Alert', which is the highest tier and is governed by the most stringent restrictions.

The revised national care home visiting guidance set the key message that each care home is responsible for setting the visiting policy in that home. Care home managers should set out their policy on the basis of 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).

This national guidance, along with our local approach based on current risk, set out that all care homes, regardless of Tier, except in the event of an active outbreak, should seek to enable:

- indoor visits where the visitor has been tested and returned a negative result, for both a PCR **and** LFT, **for each visit**
- outdoor visiting and 'screened' visits

- visits in exceptional circumstances including end of life should always be enabled

Wherever possible, we continue to encourage using virtual methods to facilitate visiting in the first instance. If it is deemed appropriate a physical visit is in the best interest of a resident, then special arrangements should be implemented to ensure visiting is safe as possible and in line with the guidance outlined above.

We ask care home managers to carefully consider the updated guidance before making arrangements for visiting. If it is necessary to cease visiting in a care home due to an active outbreak, the care home will be supported and advised by health protection colleagues.

We recognise this new guidance will place additional burden on care home staff to ensure visiting is administered safely and effectively, this comes in addition to the recent announcements to use lateral flow testing to increase the frequency of testing in staff and residents, as well as early planning to roll out vaccinations. Cumulatively this adds significantly to the responsibilities placed on you, therefore we urge you to take decisions around visiting in the context of this increasing demand on staff and take a measured approach on what is manageable without comprising the safety of staff, residents and visitors.

Thank-you for your ongoing support.

Yours faithfully,



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