

CITY OF
WOLVERHAMPTON
C O U N C I L

20 January 2021

Dear Care Home Manager

Update on care home visiting January 2021

The third national lockdown for England came into force 06 January 2021, prior to this Wolverhampton, along with the rest of Black Country and Birmingham area, had been placed into Tier 4 which was the highest tier and therefore governed by the most stringent restrictions.

As part of this move into Lockdown, the Government has published updated guidance for care home guidance, you can access this guidance by visiting <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/visiting-care-homes-during-coronavirus/update-on-policies-for-visiting-arrangements-in-care-homes> This guidance applies from 06 January 2021 and supersedes previous guidance on visiting policies for care homes.

The key is the right balance between the benefits of visiting on wellbeing and quality of life, and the risk of transmission of COVID-19 to social care staff and clinically vulnerable residents.

The revised guidance sets out the key message that each care home is responsible for setting the visiting policy in that home and that visits to care homes can take place with arrangements such as substantial screens, visiting pods, or behind windows. However, close-contact indoor visits are **not** allowed unless it is an end of life visit. In such circumstances visitors must be tested using lateral flow devices and adhere to all infection prevention measures. If the visitors tests positive, they must leave the premises immediately and follow guidance.

Each care home (the registered manager) is responsible for setting the visiting policy in that home. They should do so on the basis of a dynamic risk assessment taking into consideration the needs of individuals within their home and having regard to the advice of the local Director of Public Health (DPH).

Under the guidance the default position is that visits should be supported and enabled wherever it is safe to do so. Physical visits under the guidance can be:

- outdoor visiting and 'screened' visits
- visits in exceptional circumstances including end of life should always be enabled

In all cases it is essential that visiting happens within a wider care home environment of robust Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) measures, including ensuring that visitors follow (and are supported to follow) good practice with social distancing, hand hygiene and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) use.

In the event of an outbreak in a care home, the home should immediately stop visiting (except in exceptional circumstances such as end of life) to protect vulnerable residents, staff and visitors.

For indoor end of life visits to take place every visitor must return a negative test before each visit which must take place on the care home site, however, it is paramount to remember that testing is one way of reducing the risk of visiting a care home, but it does not mean there is no longer any risk. Stringent infection prevention measures must be followed including appropriate use of PPE, hand hygiene and maintaining distance is key to help mitigate risk of transmission. Visitor numbers should be limited to a maximum of 2 constant visitors wherever possible.

The Government is providing CQC care homes with Lateral Flow Devices, which provide test results rapidly onsite, to help facilitate testing of visitors upon arrival at care home. An indoor visit can only take place provided there is a negative test result and the visit is under exceptional circumstances such as end of life

Outdoor visits can be made available to visitors who have not been tested, in order to provide opportunities for more visitors and greater frequency of visits than the available testing capacity in the care home might enable. Social distancing must be maintained during such visits, additional restrictions are in place if temporary outdoor structures are used such as visiting pods.

Wherever possible, we encourage using virtual methods to facilitate visiting in the first instance. If it is considered that 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 national guidance. Care home managers, are best placed to decide how visits happen safely in practice, taking into account the needs and wellbeing of individual residents, and the given layout and facilities of the care home.

We ask care home managers to carefully consider the updated guidance before making arrangements for visiting.

As the vaccination programme continues to roll out in Care Homes across the city we are continuing to ask for your support with our drive to vaccinate the most vulnerable to Covid-19 in the city and your staff. Please note at this stage having residents vaccinated does not change the visiting guidance.

Thank-you for your ongoing support.

Yours faithfully,



John Denley
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Emma Bennett
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