

General

The Department of Health issued an updated version of its visiting guidance 'for Care Homes - "**Visiting with Care -The New Normal**" - on 21 December 2022' <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/health/doh-visiting-with-care-new-normal.pdf>

The guidance was developed in co-operation with the Public Health Agency, with contributions from representatives of the statutory sector, relatives and independent healthcare providers. It sets out an agreed approach to supporting visiting in care homes.

The guidance sets out the expected approach to supporting safe and proportionate visiting in care homes. This includes arrangements for the safe management of care home residents receiving visitors, as well as residents being able to visit other households and community facilities, as well as taking part in excursions.

The arrangements set out the expectation for how visiting arrangements should be managed in a range of circumstances:

Normal Arrangements (no active outbreak in the care home):

There should be no restrictions on visiting

Care Home in Outbreak:

Even should the care home experience a localised outbreak, so long as the care home has capacity and visitors are aware of the ongoing situation there should be no restrictions on visiting. Appropriate dynamic risk assessment of the care home should be used to inform decisions on the day-to-day running of visiting. IPC mitigations should be adhered to.

Widespread Community Transmission/Increased Severity: While the intention remains that visiting should continue to be facilitated for the benefit of residents, advice on an appropriate response will be issued by the Department of Health and/or Public Health Agency depending on the nature of the disease presenting via community transmission, and its severity both to residents, their visitors and the staff and the wider community.

The expectation is that in all cases, the objective will be, as far as possible, to maintain visiting as described in the "Normal Arrangements" phase of the guidance.

Table of Contents

1. [How many visitors are allowed in the home at one time?](#)
2. [Do all visitors need to book in advance?](#)
3. [Can visitors attend during mealtimes?](#)

4. **Can Children and young people visit?**
5. **What about visiting services such as hairdressers etc.?**
6. **When can residents leave the care home?**
7. **Location and length of visit during outbreak**
8. **Can visitors go to communal areas and participate in activities with the resident?**
9. **Can a visitor access refreshments and toilet facilities?**
10. **Can I bring items into the home?**
11. **Do visitors need to wear PPE?**
12. **What screening needs to take place when visitors arrive at the home?**
13. **Do visitors need to provide proof of vaccination?**
14. **Can I visit a resident who has not been vaccinated?**
15. **Is testing available for visitors?**
16. **Do staff and residents still need to be tested?**

1. How many visitors are allowed in the home at one time?

There are no restrictions on the number of visits or visitors.

[Back to top](#)

2. Do all visitors need to book in advance?

No, a booking system is not required, care homes may ask family and friends to book in advance if an outbreak is declared

[Back to top](#)

3. Can visitors attend during mealtimes?

Yes, but please check with the home in advance to ensure

- The resident is happy to receive visitors at meal times
- A visit can be accommodated if the home is practicing 'protected meal times'

[Back to top](#)

4. Can Children and young people visit?

Children and young people can visit. The responsibility will rest with the adult for supervision of the children, ensuring they adhere to all IPC measures as appropriate.

[Back to top](#)

5: What about visiting services such as hairdressers, choirs, entertainers etc.?

Visiting professionals and service providers such as hairdressers, choirs etc can visit residents as per pre COVID-19, please advise them in advance if the home is in outbreak at the time of the visit. They can still attend if they are happy to do so.

[Back to top](#)

6: When can residents leave the care home?

There are no restrictions on residents leaving the home even if that home is in outbreak.

[Back to top](#)

7: Location and length of visit during outbreak

There are no restrictions to the length of visit during outbreak

Visits can be enjoyed in

- residents own room or
- other suitable space subject to risk assessment.
- Within the grounds of the care home

[Back to top](#)

8. Can visitors go to communal areas and participate in activities with the resident?

Yes, visitors are allowed to move around the home, with visiting permissible in residents' rooms and in communal areas. However, in choosing where to enjoy their visit, due regard should be given to the feelings and concerns of other residents.

[Back to top](#)

9. Can a visitor access refreshments and toilet facilities?

Yes

10. Can I bring items into the home?

Yes

[Back to top](#)

11. Do visitors need to wear PPE?

The NI regional manual on PPE is available here. The decision to use face masks will be based on a risk assessment by the individual home and will vary based on circumstance within the home at the time. Such as are there any confirmed/ suspected flu/ COVID 19 cases, what is the level of community prevalence <https://www.niinfectioncontrolmanual.net/sars-cov-2>

[Back to top](#)

12. What screening needs to take place when visitors arrive at the home?

None

[Back to top](#)

13. Do visitors need to provide proof of vaccination?

No

[Back to top](#)

14. Can I visit a resident who has not been vaccinated?

Yes

[Back to top](#)

15. Is testing available for visitors?

All asymptomatic testing (those with no symptoms) has been paused (3rd October 2022). Please follow the guidance for the general public at: www.NIdirect.gov.uk/testing

[Back to top](#)

16. Do staff and residents still need to be tested?

Staff and residents will only be tested if they develop symptoms and /or if the care home has a suspected or confirmed outbreak.

[Back to top](#)

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