



Visiting in Care Homes

Newsletter

July 2022

Issue 3



Introduction

Since March 2021 the Public Health Agency (PHA) along with colleagues in the Department of Health (DoH) have worked with family members, RQIA, Health and Social Care Trusts and other stakeholders to design the Visiting with Care - A Pathway.

The Pathway is a road map through COVID-19 to help normalise visiting in care homes once again. The Visiting Pathway has four stages:

- 1. Cautious first steps**
- 2. Gradual easing**
- 3. Further easing**
- 4. Preparing for the future**

Each of these stages sets out varying degrees of restrictions, based on the risk to residents, visitors and staff.

Latest Developments

The good news is from 1 July 2022 there has been a move to the, '**Preparing for the Future**' stage of the Pathway. Visitors should feel assured the PHA will continue to closely monitor the situation and may advise on increasing restrictions again, should relevant information sources and surveillance data indicate the need to do so.

Who can visit?

There are no restrictions on the number of visitors to homes that are not in outbreak. Children are able to visit as long as they remain under the supervision of an adult at all times. Homes can also resume visits by schools, entertainers and community groups to provide meaningful activities for residents.

While formal Care Partner arrangements may be scaled back to reflect the easing of access restrictions, the scheme should remain in place in the event that they prove necessary or useful in certain circumstances, particularly during an outbreak situation. Further information is available at www.pha.site/CarePartnersleaflet or by talking to the Care Home Manager or the resident's Key Worker.

Where a home is in outbreak, visiting can be facilitated in accordance with the visiting in outbreak algorithm.

Where can visits take place?

Visiting can happen in residents own room, or in common areas around the care home, taking account of the rights and wishes of all residents if using communal areas. Care should also be taken to ensure communal areas do not become overcrowded.

Can residents leave the home?

Residents can leave the home as and when they wish. If a resident returns from an overnight stay with a suspected or confirmed exposure/close contact with a COVID-19 positive or symptomatic person(s) isolation will be required on return to the home.

Infection Prevention and Control (IPC)

To ensure the spread of infection is reduced as much as possible, care homes should maintain strict Infection Prevention Control measures and ensure buildings are ventilated.

Booking System

There are situations where homes may, following a risk assessment, reintroduce a booking system to help manage footfall. For example, homes that are a 'Situation of Interest', may be experiencing staffing pressures due to an increased number of staff isolating with community acquired COVID-19. The reduction in staffing available in the home may impact on a home's ability to support open access visiting.

Managers are advised to review this regularly and to discontinue booking when their risk assessment deems it is no longer necessary.

Visitors Responsibilities

COVID-19 remains a risk to care home residents. We strongly encourage families to respect requests from care home staff to continue to follow infection prevention control advice. These actions will keep residents and themselves safe.

They include:

- Maintaining good hand hygiene
- Wearing a face covering
- Do not visit if you have symptoms of COVID-19
- For symptom checker visit: www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19-symptoms

Visiting during an outbreak

With the exception of Care Partners, end of life care and in other exceptional circumstances, visiting should be discouraged until a care home declared in outbreak has received results from Day 4 to 7 testing.

This will confirm the extent of the outbreak and support the care home manager to make a dynamic risk assessment with a focus on facilitating visiting in order to maintain access to family life for all residents.