



# Visiting in Care Homes

## Newsletter

May 2022

Issue 1



### Introduction

Welcome to the first edition of the Visiting in Care Homes Newsletter. We plan to develop regular update newsletters to outline how visiting in care homes will evolve to support meaningful experience for residents, families, loved ones and care home staff and also optimise protection from COVID-19 transmission. 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. In addition to the arrangements set out in the Pathway, each resident can nominate at least two Care Partners, who will be able to have ongoing contact with the resident in almost all circumstances.

The Pathway itself 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**

We are currently at the '**Further easing**' stage of the Pathway - this means when a care home is not in outbreak:

- There is no restriction on the number of people who may visit or the number of visits but visitors must be limited to two households per day
- Visiting can happen in residents own room only with window open
- Care homes will continue to operate a booking system for all visitors including evenings and weekends
- Children can visit and the responsibility will rest with the adult for supervision
- Close physical contact enabled to include 'brief' hugging and hand holding
- Effective hand hygiene practices and masks to remain
- Residents can leave the home as and when they wish while following restrictions applicable to the general public
- Overnight stays are permissible - if the resident has 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

### Advice for families and visitors

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:

- Maintain good hand hygiene
- Wear a face covering
- Take a lateral flow test twice per week
- Do not visit if you have symptoms of COVID-19

**For symptom checker visit: [www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19-symptoms](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19-symptoms)**

### Advice for residents

- Get fully vaccinated and boosted
- Encourage your visitors to adhere to all the infection control measures while in the home
- When out of the home continue to wear a mask and adhere to social distancing where possible
- Maintain good hand hygiene, if you do come in contact with someone who has or may have COVID-19 please let the care home know

## How does the Department of Health (DoH) make its decision to progress along the Care Home Visiting Pathway?

The Public Health Agency consultants present data every four weeks on the following to advise the DoH.

- Evidence presented includes the number of:
- Positive cases in the community
- Care home outbreaks
- Severity of illness of residents with COVID-19
- Hospitalisations of residents with COVID-19
- People in ICU, deaths of residents linked to COVID-19
- Vaccinations levels amongst residents and staff
- Variants of concern in circulation locally and nationally

This evidence informs the potential level of risk presented by COVID-19 to care home residents at a particular point in time.

## Visiting during an outbreak

Until recently, an outbreak in a care home, meant that, unfortunately, all routine visits had to be suspended. Visits could remain in place in exceptional circumstances including where a resident was approaching end of life. **Since 2 May** we have been able to introduce a more individualised, risk assessed approach to permitting visiting during an outbreak. The care home manager should continue to take direction from PHA Health Protection Duty Room regarding management of the outbreak and the infection prevention and control measures (IPC) required.

Once “whole home testing” has been completed (normally around days 4-7 of any outbreak), the care home manager will make a risk assessment of the extent of the outbreak, including the level of IPC precautions are in place. Based on that assessment and the capacity of the care home to support visiting from a staffing perspective, discussions can then be arranged with potential visitors to identify the potential risk to themselves of visiting a care home in outbreak.

This will allow them to make an informed decision on whether they should visit in the circumstances that apply to them and their loved one(s). Residents can continue to leave the home for short trips/breaks during an outbreak. Care Partners who participate in routine testing can still continue with their agreed arrangements during an outbreak.

## What is a Care Partner?

A Care Partner is more than a visitor. Care Partners are able to support residents in a defined and practical way. They will normally be a close friend/family member who can provide emotional, psychological and/or physical support which has the benefit of enhancing patient centered care and maintaining the resident's health and wellbeing. This is complementary to care delivered by staff.

Being a Care Partner is something that needs to be discussed and agreed between the resident (where possible), the family member/friend and the care home manager. Each resident can ordinarily have up to two Care Partners, but can have more.

## Spring COVID-19 vaccination

A second COVID-19 booster is being offered to all care home residents with the help of Community Pharmacies. It was rolled out in April and will continue in May. While protection against mild infection appears to wane, protection against severe illness and hospitalisation is well maintained in older adults. This underlines the importance of the booster, particularly for older people. All residents are encouraged to take up the opportunity of the second booster.

## Snapshot survey about visiting

On 11 April the Patient Client Council and Public Health Agency launched a snapshot survey to hear from residents, families and staff on their recent experience of visiting into care homes. People can access the survey at <https://tinyurl.com/2p8u7dfr>

**The survey will remain open until Friday 27 May 2022.** We would encourage all families and residents to complete this survey the results will inform decisions relating to visiting going forward.

## Useful links for more information

Further information is available at [www.pha.site/CarePartnersleaflet](http://www.pha.site/CarePartnersleaflet), or by talking to the care home manager or the resident's Key Worker.

For more about COVID boosters and vaccination go to [www.nidirect.gov.uk/covid-vaccine](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/covid-vaccine)

For frequently asked Q&As and to read the Visiting Pathway in full go to [www.pha.site/FAQsVisitingCareHomes](http://www.pha.site/FAQsVisitingCareHomes)

To watch Question and Answer session about visiting in care homes with a PHA Consultant, a family member and resident, please go to [www.vimeo.com/703286149](http://www.vimeo.com/703286149)