



Visiting in Care Homes

Newsletter

June 2022

Issue 2



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. 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. We have progressed to the final stage of the Pathway, formal Care Partner arrangements may be scaled back but the scheme should remain in place in the event of further outbreaks. Further information is available at www.pha.site/CarePartnersleaflet or by talking to the care home manager or the resident's Key Worker.

Latest Developments

The good news is that we have recently been able to agree to move to the, '**Preparing for the Future**' stage of the Pathway - this means when a care home is not in outbreak:

- There should be no restrictions on the number of visits or visitors for any resident. In the first instance however, we are asking that continued use of a booking system for visits is maintained
- Visiting can happen in residents own room, or by arrangement in common areas around the care home
- Residents can leave the home as and when they wish
- 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:

- 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.

High Risk situation visiting will remain restricted to Care Partners and in exceptional circumstances including end of life. **(Review daily)**

Low Risk situation, the care home should advise residents and families of the level of general visiting that can be facilitated while ensuring all those who visit are aware of the risk to themselves of contracting COVID-19 and the need to adhere to all IPC measures. **(Review daily)**

Useful links for more information

For more about COVID boosters and vaccination go to:

www.nidirect.gov.uk/covid-vaccine

To read the Visiting Pathway in full go to:

www.health-ni.gov.uk/Covid-19-visiting-guidance

To watch Q&A session about visiting in care homes with a PHA Consultant, a family member and resident, please go to **www.vimeo.com/703286149**

Please note the Q&A session was recorded at the end of March this year and we have since moved to the 'Preparing for the Future', stage of the Pathway.