



Visiting in Care Homes Newsletter

August 2022 Issue



The Latest Review

As you will all know, we progressed to the final stage of the [Visiting With Care - A Pathway](#) guidance document, known as “**Preparing for the future**”, from 1 July 2022. Following the most recent review, our experts in the Public Health Agency have recommended maintaining that position, which effectively means that all significant restrictions to visiting in care homes here have been removed.

Therefore when a care home is ***not*** in outbreak:

- There are no restrictions on the number of visits or visitors for any resident.
- Visiting can happen in residents own room, or in common areas around the care home while respecting the wishes of all residents in doing so
- Residents can leave the home as and when they wish with overnight visits encouraged

HSC Trusts and their Care managers should work alongside care homes and residents/families to agree individual arrangements for each resident in line with this guidance. There is an expectation that any local issues relating to individual residents and/or care homes should be resolved at this local level.

Where unresolved challenges remain, families can contact the appropriate statutory agencies (RQIA, the Department of Health, Public Health Agency), who will consider the issues and provide direction.

Advice for families and visitors

COVID-19 remains a risk to care home residents. We strongly encourage everyone to continue to follow infection prevention control advice to keep residents and themselves safe. This includes maintaining good hand hygiene, wearing a face covering, and ensuring full vaccination uptake. For more about COVID boosters and vaccination go to: www.nidirect.gov.uk/covid-vaccine . Please do not visit if you have symptoms of COVID-19. For symptom checker visit: www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19-symptoms

Visiting arrangements during an outbreak

When a care home has a declared outbreak, visiting should only be discouraged until the home has received results from whole home testing. At that point the care home manager should complete a dynamic risk assessment around safely facilitating visiting for all residents for the remaining duration of the outbreak.

NB: Care Partners, end of life care and visiting in other exceptional circumstances should continue to be facilitated throughout any outbreak.

The Care Partner Scheme

The Care Partner Scheme remains additional to visiting. The scheme will continue to be available even after the COVID-19 pandemic period. As we progress back to these more normalised visiting arrangements, the need for formal Care Partnering arrangements may reduce, so a gradual scaling back of such arrangements would be expected. Full details of the Care Partner scheme are available online at: www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/health/doh-care-partner-leaf-leaflet.pdf .

Management of residents who are close contacts of COVID 19

Residents who have no symptoms of COVID 19 do not need to isolate or undertake any testing if they are either suspected or confirmed as a close contact of a COVID-19 case either through exposure within the care home or during a visit out of the home setting.

Future Plans

As we exit the worst of the pandemic, we have to remain vigilant and be aware that there remains a very real risk of new variants or significant increases in transmission rates that may require the short-term reintroduction of some visiting restrictions in future.

We have learned a lot since March 2020, and this has been used to develop updated guidance in partnership with a wide range of key stakeholders. The new guidance document, *Visiting With Care – The New Normal* will be launched and shared with you all shortly setting out an updated risk-assessed set of arrangements for residents to receive visitors, with provision in place to address challenges presented by outbreaks not only of COVID-19, but other circumstances where residents need to be protected urgently.

Useful links for more information

Information on visiting arrangements: www.health-ni.gov.uk/Covid-19-visiting-guidance