

Letter to Care Homes

Telephone 07920 548159
Ask for anne.hayes@derbyshire.gov.uk
Email AH/DH
Our ref
Your ref
Date 17th November 2020

Dear Care Home Provider

I would like to thank you for your continued efforts in this difficult time, particularly during this period of national restrictions. We have received updated guidance from the Government on visiting arrangements in Care Homes and I would like to set out below the visiting arrangements for Derbyshire during these national restrictions and beyond.

The Director of Public Health's (DPH) responsibility is to advise care home providers as to whether visiting in the local authority area may, or may not, take place, subject to national guidance. In order for any visits to happen, the Care Home Provider needs to develop a care home visiting policy which will detail how to assess and balance the risk of local disease prevalence and the ability of the care home to manage the visit safely. This policy will include a dynamic risk assessment that must formally take into account the advice of the local DPH. DPH advice will be based on infection rates, the wider risk environment and national guidance.

Our collective priority is making sure that those in care homes receive the care and support they need. This includes making sure that residents are not put at avoidable risk of contracting COVID-19.

Any assessment will also need to take into account the significant vulnerability of residents in the home, as well as compliance with obligations under the Equality Act 2010 and the Human Rights Act 1998, as applicable.

The care home's visiting policy should be made available and/or communicated to residents and families, together with any necessary variations to arrangements due to external events.

Receiving visitors is an important part of care home life. Maintaining some opportunities for visiting to take place is critical for supporting the health and wellbeing of residents and their relationships with friends and family.

Our priority, at the current time, continues to be on preventing infections in care homes and this means that visiting policies should prioritise alternatives to indoor contact visits wherever possible. Indoor contact visits are defined as visits where residents and visitors are in the same room, without a floor to ceiling divide. The following guidelines offer a

approach that care homes can use to ensure that all the necessary and appropriate precautions are in place to protect both the health & safety of those being cared for and the staff employed in the service.

National guidance can be found online at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/visiting-care-homes-during-coronavirus/update-on-policies-for-visiting-arrangements-in-care-homes>

In the event of an outbreak (2 or more linked cases) in a care home, the home should rapidly move to stop indoor contact visiting, (if this is taking place) except in exceptional circumstances such as end of life, to protect vulnerable residents, staff and visitors. These restrictions may continue until such time it is understood that the outbreak has been brought under control and the care home has recovered. The decision to restart indoor contact visiting will be taken in conjunction with the local Health Protection Team.

Dynamic Risk Assessment

Decisions on visiting policies require a dynamic risk assessment. A good practice example **is included in the 'Guidelines for Relatives Visiting Residential and Nursing Homes' document (attached), that you may wish to use to inform the risk assessment** that you are required to produce.

When developing visitor policies, providers should undertake individualised risk assessments to assess the rights and needs of individuals residents as well as any specific vulnerabilities which are outlined in the resident's care plan, and to consider the role that visiting can play in this.

Under national lock down arrangements and local alert levels very high (tier3) and high (tier2), contact visiting is not permitted within a care home, except in exceptional circumstances such as at end of life, but non-contact visits such as window visits, the use of 'pods' and technology should be actively encouraged.

If the local alert level is medium (tier 1), care homes should be open to contact visiting, if social distancing and appropriate infection and prevention control procedures are followed.

Given the significant vulnerability of some residents and the increased risks visiting will present, care homes should continue to encourage **all staff** to be part of the regular testing programme. Regular testing supports care homes to both manage and prevent the spread of the virus and will ensure risk assessments are well informed.

Framework for visiting policies

There are several ways in which visiting is possible. We have outlined various ways in appendix A with photographs of example structures in an attached document.

Always consider alternatives to in-person visiting such as video and phone calls. These should continue to be offered where it is clear it is providing as much benefit as an in-person visit.

Infection Prevention and Control Measures

In line with guidance and good IPC measures, care homes will need to ensure the following elements are in place and clearly described to friends and families as part of the care home's visiting policy.

Guidance that can be given to relatives is also in attached email.

- Visits must be pre-arranged with the manager at the home. This is to support use of a booking system rather than allowing ad hoc visits and to ensure the home manage the flow of visiting between different family and friends.
- All visits must be overseen by staff to ensure infection control and social distancing measures are adhered to. It is the responsibility of the care home to ensure there is appropriate staffing capacity to manage this.
- Where closed window visits are being undertaken, there is no limit to the number of different 'visitors' that can visit a resident, but they must only arrive on a booked basis. Visitors from a household can all visit together, as can people in a 'bubble' as they will be standing outside in the open air. Visitors from separate households should not visit together.

Finally, we recognise that it may be necessary for care homes to take a bespoke approach to visiting in order to meet the needs of a particular resident or group of residents; the care planning, visiting policy and risk assessments will need to reflect that and involve residents and their families to the fullest extent possible.

I hope that, using the guidance above, you will be able to facilitate closed window visits and where available, garden and visiting pods, to help to mitigate some of the impact of this unrelenting and uncompromising virus on the wellbeing of those you care for.

We continue to regularly update and enhance the COVID-19 microsite which is part of the Derbyshire County Council website, you can find information on local infection rates, areas of concern, the local outbreak response plan and many other resources and supporting information linked to the COVID-19 pandemic. The link to the cover page for the microsite is:

<https://www.derbyshire.gov.uk/social-health/health-and-wellbeing/health-protection/diseasecontrol/coronavirus/coronavirus-covid-19.aspx>

This document uses both the [government guidance](#) and the [Care Provider Alliance visitor's protocol](#)

If you have any queries regarding the content of this letter then please contact Anne Hayes (Assistant Director of Public Health/Consultant in Public Health) via email at: anne.hayes@derbyshire.gov.uk.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dean Wallace', written in a cursive style.

Dean Wallace
Director of Public Health