

Visiting care homes in Derbyshire

The following information relates to the latest Government guidance on visiting in care homes published by the Department of Health and Social Care on 1st December 2020.

What is Derbyshire County Council doing to support care home visiting in Derbyshire?

We are looking closely at Government guidance to do what we can to enable family members living in a care home to see relatives face to face. However, we also need to balance this against considerations that also protects residents and the workforce in care homes from the spread of COVID-19. This is not an easy situation and there is not necessarily a one-size fits all answer that pleases everyone.

We are providing guidance to care homes and every circumstance is unique and factors such as the individual's health, the family member's wishes, the physical layout of the care home and the staffing resource to enable safe visiting must be considered. Across all the care homes in Derbyshire a range of solutions that are right for each individual home will be put in place and allow care home managers to appropriately balance risks and seek to do what is right for the individual, the family and the home.

What does the guidance say?

Since March, we have shared advice and guidance with care home managers and owners across Derbyshire. We have taken Government guidance and sought to apply it to the care home environment and provide practical advice and information. We have supported care homes in this way since the start of the pandemic in March and we continue to publish the latest guidance on the council's website. We have worked with colleagues across the East Midlands to develop guidance so there is clear and consistent advice across the region. You can access a copy here: <https://www.derbyshire.gov.uk/social-health/health-and-wellbeing/health-protection/disease-control/coronavirus/employers-businesses/care-service-providers/covid-19-additional-guidance-for-residential-care-providers/additional-guidance.aspx> The guidance can be accessed via links at the bottom of the above webpage. Please be assured we are keeping this guidance under constant review as Government guidance changes.

Do care homes have to follow this visiting guidance?

Care homes have put in place visiting policies and procedures and the local authority has shared guidance about what we would expect these to detail, but it is ultimately up to each care home operator to decide what to include in their policy. Some larger care home operators have also put in place corporate guidance which they may be utilising alongside local authority guidance and smaller businesses have developed their own approach.

Visitor policy decisions rightly sit with individual care providers who need to take into account the national guidance, local public health advice and consider this in light of their own risk assessment processes, staffing needs and care home environment, there is no one size fits all solution. Please bear in mind the local Public Health role in relation to care home visiting is to provide advice, it is for individual care home providers to decide what they do with that advice.

Will I be able to have my say about visiting policies and procedures?

We have, and continue to, encourage care home managers to openly engage with family members of residents about the development of these policies and procedures.

What are Lateral Flow Device tests?

A Lateral Flow Device test is a rapid test for Covid-19. If the home where your family member or friend resides uses this then you will be asked to undertake a Lateral Flow Device test every time you visit. This will involve a nose and throat swab and the results will be available within 30 minutes. The care home staff will ask you to complete the swabbing yourself, supervised by a trained staff member.

The test is very straightforward and you will be supported throughout the process by a member of staff from the care home. Full instructions will be provided to you on arrival for your scheduled visit.

Will lateral flow testing allow me to visit a relative or friend in a care home?

Lateral Flow Devices are currently being delivered to care homes in Derbyshire and will be available in the coming weeks. Alongside other Infection Prevention and Control measures, including wearing appropriate PPE and the care home's policy on indoor visiting, these new tests for Covid-19 will allow indoor visiting in care homes regardless of the Tier restrictions except in the event of an active Covid-19 outbreak in the care home. If Lateral Flow Testing is not available other visiting arrangements such as outdoor and screened visits may be available. Visitors should speak to the care home to discuss visiting options further.

Lateral flow testing is a centrally co-ordinated programme that is being rolled out by the Department of Health and Social Care during December. We are currently working with the Department of Health and Social Care to understand how we can support implementation locally.

I've seen reports in the media regarding concerns about Lateral Flow Testing?

Yes, there are some risks associated with this type of testing, especially those with a false negative test result where someone who is COVID+ is permitted to visit a care home resident. Government has issued guidance to care homes about this testing and it will be up to individual homes to decide whether they wish to implement lateral flow testing in a care home as part of their procedures for enabling visits.

The national guidance on Lateral Flow Device testing can be found at the link below:

[Care home LFD testing of visitors guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/care-home-lfd-testing-of-visitors-guidance)

Can I visit when the care home has an outbreak of COVID-19?

Where a home does have an outbreak (defined as 2 or more confirmed positive cases) of COVID-19 it is right that all visiting immediately stops, this is to help prevent the spread of the disease within the local community and is in effect the same as asking someone and their close contacts to isolate in their own home. We would also routinely suspend care home visiting where a home has an outbreak of an infectious disease, such as norovirus.

Will I need to wear PPE when I visit a care home?

Yes, care homes need to continue to manage the risks associated with COVID-19 on an ongoing basis, therefore visits will need to take place with visitors wearing full PPE and where possible maintaining social distancing, even if you have a negative Covid test. Where there are exceptional circumstances, such as end of life care, a care home manager maybe able to put other arrangements in place, but this would be up to an individual home to decide

What do I do if I am concerned about the safety of a resident?

If family members have safeguarding concerns it is of upmost importance these are reported to the authority or to the Care Quality Commission. The CQC have arrangements in place to continue to visit homes where there are serious safeguarding concerns and it is vital that family members report concerns. We have also put arrangements in place to align social workers to specific homes to help mitigate any concerns regarding reduced inspections and oversight. Healthcare staff visiting the home are also encouraged to proactively consider safeguarding as and when they visit a home.

In summary:

LFDs alone aren't a silver bullet for stopping the spread of the virus. But we are confident that they can detect large numbers of individuals in a rapid and timely manner. If used in combination with other vital infection prevention control measures such as wearing appropriate PPE, washing hands regularly and social distancing, they are another tool to allow people to have that vital time with those they love while helping to keep them safer.

(Information taken from a Public Health England blog:

<https://publichealthmatters.blog.gov.uk/2020/12/08/lateral-flow-testing-new-rapid-tests-to-detect-covid-19/>)