

15th December 2021

Dear Sir /Madam

National Care Group COVID-19 Response

I am writing to you to outline our position in respect of visiting arrangements following new Government advice in respect of *care homes* in England which comes into effect on the 15th December 2021.

We continue with the belief that throughout the pandemic we fully recognise the important part relatives and friends play in the lives of the individuals we support but that our primary objective is to keep everyone safe and well. This continues to be at the forefront of decisions we make, and I believe this can be evidenced at every level within our organisation.

Delivering the right support at this difficult time

As of 15th December 2021, this Governmental guidance replaces previous guidance on care home visiting. It applies to care homes for working age and for older adults.

Visiting a Care Home

The principles are as follows:

- All Individuals we support will be able to nominate three named visitors who will be able to enter the care home for regular visits. This will be in addition to all individuals being able to nominate an essential care giver who can visit for companionship or for care needs. The nominated visitors should remain the same, barring an exceptional change in circumstances.
- Visits at the end of life will always be supported.
- Visitors should be tested using rapid lateral flow tests before every visit, must wear the appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) and follow all other infection control measures (which the care home will guide them on) during visits.
- We will continue to offer visits to other friends or family members with arrangements such as outdoor visiting, substantial screens, visiting pods, or behind windows
- Individuals we support should not be put at avoidable risk of contracting COVID – 19 and we must assess the balance of risk and the local prevalence of COVID – 19 (based on advice from local Public Health authorities) and the ability to manage visits safely. This includes the ability of individuals we support and their visitor to maintain safe social distancing.
- It is not mandatory that the visitor or the resident should have been vaccinated. However, it is strongly recommended that all visitors and residents take up the opportunity to be vaccinated and have also received the booster vaccination.
- Individual risk assessments must be in place to assess the rights and needs of the individuals we support.
- Where COVID – 19 cases are suspected or confirmed, visiting arrangements must be reviewed and amended to restrict to only essential visits.
- A visiting policy should be adopted that reflects local circumstances including the layout of a service. Clear guidance must be agreed on within services that determine how visits should be conducted and facilitated.

As a result of the guidance issued and the expectation that providers will facilitate visits in line with the principles above, I can advise that if you wish to proceed with a visit you should talk to your usual contact within the service to discuss the situation locally and to establish how to proceed. All services

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will have local procedures in place, and these will be explained to you. We will do everything that we can to facilitate a visit as long as the above principles can be met and where we would recommend a different or revised approach this can be discussed with you. We hope that you will understand that for the safety of everyone we may need to manage the timing of some visits so that overall numbers visiting at a particular time can be consistent with the principles of the Government guidance.

Visiting out of a Care Home

Updated guidance has also been released for individuals when going out of their home. The principles are as follows;

Individuals should;

- avoid visiting people they do not usually spend time with regularly
- avoid visits out that involve mixing with a large number of people indoors
- ask those they are visiting to undertake regular LFD testing, and receive a negative LFD on the day of the visit
- ask those they are visiting to have had their COVID-19 vaccinations including booster if eligible

For other visits out of the home it will be a requirement for individuals who have had two doses of the vaccine, or who are exempt, to take LFD tests every day for 10 days when they return from spending time out of the care home.

Individuals who have not had two doses of the vaccine and who are not exempt, will be required isolate for 14 days following a visit out in order to mitigate the risk that they endanger their fellow residents by bringing the new variant into the care home.

Individuals will still be asked to self-isolate following an emergency stay in hospital or following a visit out of the care home that is determined to be high-risk following an individual risk assessment.

We are here to provide support

If following your discussion with your normal service contact, you are not happy with the proposed way forward please do contact the National Care Group Regional Operations Manager in your area for advice. Contact details will be provided to you upon request by your normal service contact.

I empathise with all of you as not being able to see relatives as you would normally, can be distressing. The guidance from the Government enables us to continue to work collaboratively with yourselves and your relatives to find the safest way for you to meet.

Thank you once again for your continued support at this difficult time.

James Allen
Chief Executive