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Providing care services

Dear All,

Re: - COVID-19 Update – Visiting our Care Homes Safely

I hope you all remain safe and well and apologies that this is another lengthy update!!

As we reach a point where things are slowly starting a return to some sort of normality, it's perhaps hard to believe that we have now passed the milestone of 12 months since we first went into lockdown in our homes and as a country. "Thank you" has been said many times along the way but I think it is an opportune time to once again say, "thank you" to everyone involved with our homes – staff, residents, relatives – for their perseverance, patience, support and understanding, and to our staff in particular for their hard work and determination to get through it all safely.

As I reported in the previous update, the Government guidance on visiting arrangements for care homes was due to be further reviewed from 12th April, and as I'm sure you will be aware, that was confirmed last week with the updated guidance being published on Wednesday this week.

Essentially, all visiting options remain as they were except that it is now possible for two constant/named visitors to enter the homes for regular visits to residents.

I have attached a summary of the guidance and this along with the full version can be found on the Government website using the following link: –

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/visiting-care-homes-during-coronavirus>

As ever, the guidance is extensive, but the main "headlines" are: -

- Every care home resident can nominate up to 2 named visitors who will be able to enter the home for regular visits. They can visit together or separately as preferred.
- These visitors must be tested using rapid lateral flow tests before every visit and the visit can only take place if they return a "negative" result. Visitors must also wear the appropriate PPE issued by the home and follow all other infection control measures as advised by the home during visits.
- Visitors are not required to have been vaccinated.
- The rapid lateral flow tests must be conducted onsite in line with current MHRA guidance, due to the type of test kit care homes receive.
- Residents can meet with both of their 2 named visitors at the same time (for example, during the same visit as long as the care home is able to accommodate this) or can meet with them separately if that is what they prefer.

- Visitors must also ensure they observe strict social distancing from other residents, visitors and staff at all times.
- It is possible for someone aged under 18 to be one of the 2 nominated visitors, if the resident, family, and the care home all agree that is appropriate.
- We recognise that in some cases it may be difficult for friends and family to make a visit if they are not able to bring children with them and we would not want to unnecessarily restrict residents' opportunities to see visitors in these situations. Any visits involving children should be carefully considered by the family.
- It is very important that any children visiting are able to follow IPC measures carefully. That means social distancing, PPE use and advice on minimising physical contact, as well as being able to follow any other instructions or advice the care home staff might provide.
- Any children visiting (apart from babies and very young children) should also be counted towards the maximum number allowed for the visit.
- Visits including babies and very young children (under the age of 2) may take place with the agreement of the care home manager and these children do not need to be counted as an additional visitor. Care home managers and families can agree to exercise some discretion here.
- As is the case with visitors of all ages, there should be no close physical contact between babies or young children and the residents they are visiting.
- Children aged 11 and over should wear the same PPE as adult visitors. Children under the age of 3 should not wear masks, for safety reasons
- It is not currently recommended that children under the age of 11 participate in regular asymptomatic testing.
- Visitors and residents are advised to keep physical contact to a minimum. They may hold hands, but should bear in mind that any physical contact increases the risk of transmission and for this reason there should not be close physical contact such as hugging.

I appreciate there are a lot of rules again but please can I ask you to fully read at least these main summary points to avoid any unnecessary confusion.

Can I also ask everyone to please take note of the following points made in the guidance and to continue to respect the guidance, and the homes' staff, at all times before, during and after your visit:-

- *The care home manager and staff have the job of keeping everyone safe and helping everyone have a good experience of visiting. They need your support. Please help them out.*

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- *When you visit you are not just coming into your loved one's home, you are also in the home of many other residents. So please follow any advice and instructions that the care home staff give you to keep everyone safe.*
- *Care home managers may have to refuse to allow someone to continue to visit if they refuse to follow advice or instructions (such as wearing PPE properly). Nobody would want that to happen, but the care home manager needs to keep everybody in the home safe.*
- *Care homes will only be able to welcome a certain number of visitors every day. This is simply because visitors need to socially distance and so staff can help them take their tests.*
- *You will need to make an appointment to visit and the care home might not be able to offer an appointment to everyone as often as they would like.*

For further clarity, close-contact indoor visits are offered **in addition** to visits booked inside our screened visiting rooms and to garden/outdoor visits. When you call to book any form of visit therefore, please can I ask that you are clear about what type of visit you are booking. This will avoid any unnecessary confusion or disappointment when you arrive at the home, particularly as the arrangements on arrival are different for each type of visiting.

As before, I am so sorry for all the rules but I hope you can understand why it is all necessary, and apologies again for the lengthy update and for the short notice. I appreciate there is a lot of information here so if you have any immediate questions, please do not hesitate to contact me, or indeed the home.

We will continue to keep things under regular review and will look to increase the number of visits as is possible and/or in accordance with further updated Government guidance. The next review being due by 17 May.

Best wishes,



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