



Coronavirus (COVID-19): Christmas and New Year guidance for adult care homes and visitors

23 December 2020

Version	Date	Summary of changes
1.1	23/12/20	Guidance updated to take account of additional restrictions in place from Boxing Day.

Introduction

Christmas and New Year are an important time for many residents and their loved ones. This guidance aims to reiterate existing national guidelines that **all** care homes should safely resume indoor visiting where recommended, in Levels 0-3. Ideally, care homes should seek to achieve this for the coming festive period where that has not already been done, up to 26th December, when additional restrictions come into force for mainland Scotland. The guidance also sets out specific safeguards that care homes can put in place to support festive activities while continuing to manage transmission risk.

Balancing the serious risks posed by the virus to care home residents with the ability to see friends and family throughout any holiday period remains challenging. However, recognising the beneficial effects of participating in festive events and ensuring that visiting can take place, where recommended, is crucial to the wellbeing of residents and their families and friends.

The UK-wide relaxation of restrictions on 25th December does not apply to visiting people in care homes or residents. The safest way to spend Christmas and protect care home residents, if people want to visit someone in a care home, is to stay within your own household and not form a bubble with any other household.

Visiting to adult care homes throughout the Christmas and New Year period remains linked to the local level of restrictions. For areas in **Level 4, from 26th December all of mainland Scotland**, only essential visits are recommended alongside window and garden visits. In some exceptional circumstances indoor visiting may be permitted by the Director of Public Health following a risk assessment and discussion with the care home and local oversight team.

Visiting and associated activities should be seen as imperative where the advice is that it can be safely supported. In these instances (in Levels 0-3), it should be supported generously and sympathetically, whenever it is safe to do so. It is important that decisions are made carefully and proportionately, especially decisions that involve the protection of rights, such as the right to religious freedom and to a family life.

Part 1: Key points for visiting and celebrating the festive season

Advice for visiting family and friends

You can, up to and including on Christmas day:

- visit loved ones – if safe to do so, note existing national visiting recommendations continue
- bring gifts into the care home, liaising with care homes first to arrange
- travel into and out of Levels 3 and 4 to visit loved ones in care homes – this is exempt from the national restrictions
- always have an essential visit if needed, no matter the stage in the pandemic
- remember, the safest way to spend Christmas and protect care home residents, if people want to visit someone in a care home, would be to stay within your own household and not form a bubble with any other household.
- change the designated visitor by discussing and arranging with the care home in advance
- best protect your loved ones by paying special attention to continuing with safe behaviours (remember FACTS) before and during your visit
- from 14th-25th December, ask the care home about taking a test before your visit. They will tell you how to do this, either at the care home or at a nearby test centre. Testing is not compulsory but is strongly recommended and is in addition to existing safety measures such as wearing PPE

From 26th December onwards,

- all of Scotland will move to Level 4 - except Orkney, Shetland, the Western Isles, and the other island communities where restrictions have been reduced in recent weeks, who will be placed in Level 3.
- visiting loved ones in care homes in Level 4 will temporarily reduce to essential visits only (indoors) and outdoor garden or window visits, arranged with care home in advance. Outdoor visits are also recommended to reduce to only one visitor at a time and to exclude children and young people, because of the additional risks of the new variant.
- In level 4 areas, if you are having an essential visit, you can take a test at the care home, in addition to existing safety precautions such as PPE.
- Island communities in Level 3 can continue with visiting and testing guidance prior to 26th December.

Advice for care homes

You can:

- support Christmas traditions and celebrations with Christmas trees, decorations etc., adopting a number of measures, which are outlined below, to mitigate any risks. Continue to maintain an up to date risk assessment
- continue to support (or adopt) visiting in line with national guidance of 12th October, updated on 22nd December, and including essential visits at all times
- continue to generously support essential visits regardless of which Level of restrictions your care home is in
- draw on support from oversight arrangements if you have any questions or concerns around how to implement a safe and balanced approach to visiting
- plan with the resident's wishes being paramount, and communicate in advance with families
- continue visiting, with or without visitor testing, because it is additional to existing infection prevention and control measures, rather than a replacement
- in Level 3 areas, support residents in care homes not for older adults to leave the care home for day and overnight visits (if they and families wish), with testing and self-isolation on return. Residents leaving the care home is not recommended while areas are in Level 4.
- screen for symptom awareness before visits, and test designated visitors (where consent is in place) in line with local arrangements, alongside IPC and PPE and sharing of visitor contact details for test and protect.

From 26th December:

- all of Scotland will move to Level 4 - except Orkney, Shetland, the Western Isles, and the other island communities where restrictions have been reduced in recent weeks, who will be placed in Level 3.
- Areas in level 4 should reduce visiting to the following, at frequency agreed with visitors:
 - Indoor visits: essential visits only
 - Outdoor visits: garden or window visits, arranged in advance. As a result of the additional risk posed by the new variant, garden visits should now be limited to one visitor and visits by children and young people should be suspended.

- Areas in Level 3 can continue with existing guidance on visiting and testing of designated visitors.

Part 2: Christmas celebrations

Christmas trees and decorations

We know that care homes have a strong tradition of making Christmas special for their residents. Care homes can continue to do this and put up Christmas trees and decorations. To mitigate any risk associated with this, we recommend that:

- Christmas trees are preferably placed in an area where contact/touching is minimal. We recognise that it is not practical for Christmas trees and decorations to be cleaned in the same manner as other items in a care home.
- consider the risk of regular resident touch and if appropriate arrange a discreet boundary around the tree.
- decorations are chosen and sited to minimise touching and are non-edible - placing of decorations should allow areas they are placed in to be cleaned
- where decorations are to be hung from the ceiling, no ceiling tiles should be moved to place them (in line with existing good practice for general infection prevention control)
- decorations are as clutter-free as possible
- hand hygiene procedures continue to be maintained
- normal surface cleaning and disinfection procedures apply, including where care homes have an outbreak

Christmas Gifts

Christmas is also a time when gifts are traditionally exchanged. Residents should be supported to give and receive gifts. As a reminder, there are mitigations to doing this as safely as possible:

- gifts are wiped clean on receipt by the care home (or quarantined for 72 hours in a sealed plastic bag)
- home baking can be supported to be brought in, and should only be consumed by the resident who receives it (sharing food and utensils can be a source of

transmission so should be avoided). There should also be the normal adherence to food hygiene precautions and regulations around bringing in food for residents

Festive Characters

We know that many care home residents enjoy visits from Santa or other festive characters. Residents should still be able to participate in and enjoy these activities. But this year, we need you to make this as safe as possible. Our advice is to do the below:

- the role of Santa – or any other festive character - is played by someone from the existing care home staff cohort. In line with existing staffing recommendations, there should be no movement of staff across different care homes or floors and this will need to be factored into your preparations
- in line with existing guidance, anyone dressed as festive/holiday characters should avoid hugging residents, staff and visitors. Shaking hands can be supported as long as hand hygiene is performed between each contact
- characters avoid going from person to person to prevent transmission
- staff playing the role of Santa (and others) change into their outfit at the care home and do not travel into and out of the care home in 'costume'. Outfits are removed at end of the visit and washed at the highest possible temperature that the material can withstand, on their own, i.e. not with any other items in the same wash cycle. Otherwise (e.g. if not washable), the outfit or items of outfit should be quarantined for 72 hours between use

Communal activities

Christmas and New Year are a time when people get together to celebrate and we are keen to ensure that residents can have an enjoyable time, whilst managing the risk of transmission.

Christmas lunch/shared meals should go ahead and care homes should plan ways to mitigate risks by organising different meals in staggered cohorts, and/or in socially distanced communal areas. Food should always be served on individual plates, especially where 'finger food' is being provided. Eating utensils should not be

shared and by serving food in individual plates there is no need for serving utensils at the table.

Carol singing can take place and should always be outdoors where groups or individuals who are not part of the care home staff cohort are coming to sing, and physical distancing and symptom awareness should be maintained. Doors should be opened to assist hearing. Any performances should be planned and delivered in line with [guidance for performing arts](#).

Religious services should be supported and spiritual/faith and belief representatives or leaders should be encouraged to attend, as per existing guidance. Attendance at worship outside the home should be supported electronically.

All current Infection Prevention and Control and safety recommendations should be followed during communal activity, including hand hygiene, respiratory and cough hygiene – ‘Catch it, bin it, kill it’ - and physical distancing of 2 metres in all areas including non-clinical areas

Testing for care home visitors

The First Minister announced on 2 December that lateral flow tests will be provided to care homes from 14 December to enable care homes to begin to adopt testing for designated visitors. It is possible that not all homes will be able to make use of lateral flow tests available before Christmas, and so we are also planning to make PCR testing of visitors available over the festive period. Separate guidance has been provided, alongside online workshops for care homes, to support roll-out.

Visiting is not dependent on testing, but visitors should be supportively encouraged to take a test because it provides additional protection for their loved one. This is an additional layer of protection to enhance existing safety protocols and practices and to provide additional confidence to care homes, staff, residents and visitors. If visitors do not wish to take a test you should explore the reasons for this, discuss the benefits, and support visiting in line with existing guidance after assessing the risks. Any visitors who test positive will not be admitted and will be redirected to Test and Protect support.

From 26th December, areas in Level 4 will pause routine visiting by designated visitors and during this time, tests can be offered to essential visitors. Areas in Level 3 should continue to offer testing to designated visitors only. Training, guidance and templates (including visitor information) are available online for care homes to use.

Person centred planning

To support this, care homes should:

- work with local oversight arrangements to develop their visiting plan for the festive period, including particular attention to key days and any need for measures such as additional staffing, staggering visitors and staff breaks
- engage early with residents and their loved ones/representatives to identify the level and nature of desired visiting in advance
- be flexible to requests to change designated visitors
- undertake contingency planning with local oversight arrangements to agree local visiting policy in the event that their area moves to Level 4 consider carefully and in advance any staff plans to form extended bubbles on 25th December, including the risks to residents, loved ones and others.
- always support essential visits, including in Level 4.

Supporting residents to visit outside the care home (only care homes not registered as for older adult)

Where residents and their families in care homes not for older adults wish to leave for day or overnight visits, in addition to existing advice and health protection liaison where needed, the following mitigating actions should be considered for any visits up to and including Christmas Day:

- assess individual needs and risks
- facilitate only one bubble with the household that residents will visit (not three).
- ask residents and others in the household they're visiting to take steps to minimise risk and prevent infection, recognising the risk of infection to everyone in the care home when the resident returns
- this includes maintaining social distance; washing hands regularly, letting plenty of fresh air into rooms (opening windows and doors) and ideally limiting the

number of people they meet for two weeks prior to a care home resident coming into their household to minimise their potential exposure to the virus.

- As above, testing and self-isolation of residents is recommended on their return.

From 26th December, we are not recommending visits outwith the home while Level 4 restrictions remain in place, due to the additional risks of the new variant of Covid-19.

Visits outside the care home (by people living in care homes registered as for older adults) (Levels 3 and 4)

Current visiting recommendations that people living in care homes registered as for older adults do not leave the care home for day or overnight visits remain in place.

This is due to the additional risks posed by the virus to people over the age of 65.

For all residents of adult care homes, there may be situations where care homes, residents or their loved ones wish to seek advice on these recommendations. Where this is the case, in the first instance discussion between care homes, residents and their loved ones should take place and with additional advice, support and risk assessment from local multidisciplinary teams.

Further information

A range of other guidance documents are available to supporting celebrating and visiting over Christmas and New Year. See:

- [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): adult care homes guidance](#)
- [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): adult care home visitor testing guidance](#)
- [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): new guidance for the festive period](#)
- [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): local protection levels](#)
- [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) advice on travel and transport](#)
- [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): performing arts and venues sector](#)