Safe homes

Visiting your relative or friend living in a care home, during the COVID-19 pandemic

Information and advice

This leaflet summarises national guidance on:

- when visiting can happen
- the phased return to normal visiting and activities
- how you can help to keep everyone safe
- what to expect at your visit

12 October 2020
Introduction

Visiting with family and friends is vital and is now being supported by care homes to happen in person again.

Balancing the risks of harm from COVID-19 with important considerations such as the risks of reduced contact with loved ones is hugely important. As our residents remain at a higher risk from Coronavirus (COVID-19), visits need to be carefully managed. Our approach will be individualised to ensure:

- the risk of infection is minimised
- the safety of our residents, their visitors, and our staff
- opportunities are provided for increasing visits, which are an important part of residents’ lives

Every person’s experience is unique, but we hope this document might help address some of your concerns. If you want more advice, please contact the Care Home Manager who will be very happy to speak to you.

When visiting will happen

The current proposed phasing of introducing controlled visiting is shown below. Each stage is dependent on guidance from the Scottish Government based on advice of the Scientific Advisory Committee and applies to homes which do not have active outbreaks of COVID-19.

Care homes will decide, as far as possible with you, what visiting arrangements are safe and manageable, based on the circumstances in the care home and of residents. Limitations should be as few as possible, to be proportionate and fair.
## Staged approach to visiting and communal activity

*(All stages are dependent on the scientific advice given at the time)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage readiness</th>
<th>Stage 1 (before lifting lockdown restrictions)</th>
<th>Stage 2 (Subject to scientific advice)</th>
<th>Stage 3 (Updated at 12 October 2020)</th>
<th>Stage 4 (Subject to scientific advice)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visiting</td>
<td>Essential visits only (to prevent or respond to changes in wellbeing)</td>
<td>Essential visits</td>
<td>Essential visits</td>
<td>Essential visits</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Visits to the care home to see loved ones through the window, arranged with care home in advance.</td>
<td>Garden visits with one designated visitor for 30 minutes once a week.</td>
<td>Indoor visits with one designated visitor per visit for up to four hours once a week, as long all necessary safety measures have been put in place.</td>
<td>Controlled programme of garden and indoor visits.</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Visits to the care home to see loved ones through the window, arranged with the care home in advance.</td>
<td>Greater involvement in aspects of residents’ personal care or more interactive time together, as long this is in the resident’s room and existing IPC/PPE recommendations are met. Examples include mealtimes or hair care</td>
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<td>Garden visits with up to six visitors from no more than 2 different households at the same time, and for up to one hour once a week. (NB – visits with residents who are bed bound or unable to go outside can happen at a window). Children and young people can attend outdoor visits and are counted in maximum of six people.</td>
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<td>Communal activity</td>
<td>Avoidance of communal areas</td>
<td>Residents’ use outdoor areas in limited numbers. Avoidance of indoor communal areas.</td>
<td>Residents use outdoor areas in limited numbers. Avoidance of indoor communal areas.</td>
<td>Residents’ use of lounge, communal dining area and outdoors in limited numbers – all with physical distancing, supervision and staff wearing PPE.</td>
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</table>
Working together to visit safely

We all have an important role to play in keeping everyone safe – our loved ones and staff working in care homes.

Our progress through the pandemic is constantly changing. As visiting in care homes increases and levels of COVID-19 in the community remain very changeable, we all need to be watchful that we do everything possible to visit as safely as possible.

The following SAFE HOMES acronym outlines how visiting family and friends can help with this – and how care home staff will help you.

SAFE HOMES

Family and friends visiting can help by:

- Staying at home if you are unwell (state symptoms)
- Arranging your visit in advance (and any changes)
- Face coverings – wearing these and any other PPE required by the care home
- Engaging with the care home – you are partners in care and share an interest in keeping your family and others safe

The care home will help by:

- Helping you to feel supported when visiting (e.g. informed, a safe and welcoming space, appropriate equipment)
- Open to your concerns and needs
- Managing visit appointments in a safe manner
- Enabling essential visits, in partnership with you, if your family member’s wellbeing is affected, or they are reaching the end of their life
- Show you how to visit safely.
Essential visits and designated visitors

The definitions of an essential visit and designated visitor are outlined below.

Essential visitors will be permitted throughout all stages of the visiting pathway.

Essential visits

Essential visits are incredibly important for people’s health and wellbeing, and should be facilitated by care homes throughout all stages of the visiting pathway.

These should be supported in the following circumstances:

1. to prevent or respond to residents’ health and wellbeing changing for the worse,
2. to help with communication and/or distress,
3. allowing important time with loved ones, in circumstances approaching end of life.

Children and young people can go on essential visits at all stages of the pandemic, with standard safety and PPE measures in place (as for others).

Flexibility is recommended around the number, frequency and duration of essential visits when someone’s loved one is deteriorating, and is at the reasonable discretion of the care home manager (or another senior staff member if the manager is not available).

The care home manager will work with you to give you as much advance notice as possible to help you make practical arrangements (such as travel) for visiting.

Designated visitor

A Designated Visitor is someone chosen by the resident who they would like to be their named visitor. This might be a spouse or next of kin or a friend. That person will be the first to visit in the early stages of allowing visiting and the main link to the home for a resident.
You can change the designated visitor in discussion with the care home in certain circumstances. These include:

1. when the usual designated visitor will be unavailable for a visit and the resident wants to see someone else instead, or
2. when visitors (especially family members) are travelling from a distance.

**Before you visit**

Visiting will be arranged with you via the Home Manager. Visits will initially be restricted to one designated person, once per week and for limited periods of time, for a maximum of four hours per visit (excluding preparation and discussion with staff before and after). These will involve pre-arranged appointments to ensure we limit the number of people in the care home and to allow us time to clean between visits. During stage 3 indoor visiting, the designated person can be alternated however any changes are entirely at the reasonable discretion of the care home manager, recognising that a number of factors need to be taken into account.

You must wear a face covering so please bring one with you if possible. If any further Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is required, the care home will provide this for you.

You can bring in gifts and belongings of the person you are visiting but should keep these to a minimum unless they are vital. The care home will need to wipe items clean or put them in a sealed bag for 72 hours before passing them to your loved one. This approach is to reduce the opportunity for the virus to be carried into the care home and being passed unknowingly to your loved one.

You should not bring in non-helium balloons or food/baking that is home prepared, to minimise the risk of the virus coming into the home.

**During your visit**

It is critically important for the health and wellbeing of your loved one that you do not visit if you have been feeling unwell in any way.

You will be asked a series of questions by the staff:
• are you feeling unwell?
• do you have a new/continuous cough?
• have you had any sickness or diarrhoea within the last 48 hours?
• have you noticed a change in your temperature?
• have you noticed a change to your normal sense of taste or smell?
• have you been in contact with anyone suspected as having, or who has tested positive for COVID-19, in the past 14 days?

Downloading and using the ‘Protect Scotland’ app on your smartphone will help you to know if you have been in close contact with someone who had had a positive Covid-19 test. This is part of NHS Scotland’s Test and Protect scheme.

You will be asked to complete a log book or a form with your contact details; this is to assist Public Health, Trace and Protect colleagues should there be a need to contact you.

A visitors’ protocol, which you will be given when you arrive, will explain the things you need to do, e.g. hand washing requirements and wearing a face covering or other Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) if appropriate.

You will be asked to sign that you have understood and agree to the protocol, including the need to wear PPE at all times. The care home will provide the necessary PPE which should be placed in the bin when you leave.

**How quickly you can see your family member/friend**

We acknowledge and appreciate how supportive families have been during this difficult time and we recognise that you will want to see your relative as soon as possible. Please be patient with our staff while they are facilitating these meetings – resident safety is our priority. Homes have to meet criteria to allow visits and these include:

• being COVID free / or fully recovered from COVID for 28 days
• a risk assessment and visiting protocol has to have been agreed with the local Health Protection team
• care homes must fully participate in resident and staff testing programmes.
What the first visit might be like

When you visit your relative again it may look and feel different from before. Initially visits will take place in the garden where social distancing can be maintained. In the case of inclement weather we may have a gazebo type structure to keep you and your loved one dry.

Initially, as explained above, indoor visitors will be limited to one designated family member. At each stage, when guided by the Scottish Government, this limit will be revised and altered dependent on the outbreak status of the virus and any outbreak within the home.

Staff will be with you and your relative during the visit to advise on infection control measures and provide support if needed.

Wearing a face covering

Meeting outside reduces the risk of you passing on the virus but it does not eliminate it completely. It is therefore important that you wear your face covering or mask correctly. Please remember that your loved one may have become used to our staff wearing a mask, although you may need to take time to explain to your friend/relative why you are wearing one.

When wearing a face mask you should:

- speak slightly louder and clearer
- use the tone of your voice to convey your message
- consider writing information down for your relative to read, if they can
- use gestures / signs to communicate
- keep eye contact
- try and wear clothing that your relative may recognise
If your relative/friend wants to cuddle or touch you

One of the hardest aspects of the COVID-19 situation is the need for physical distancing between those of different households, including family members. Not everyone will understand the need to do this and they may want to greet you with some sort of physical contact. While the recommendations for physical distancing remain in place for everyone’s safety, we recognise that sometimes, touch is important to both residents and visitors – for example if someone is upset or very unwell.

You should work with the care home staff to get training and support to safely put PPE on and take it off again, and to be clear on what you need to do to prevent any spread of infection. You will need to wear a mask, apron and gloves if you think that you will want or need to have contact with your loved one.

Is a window visit possible?

A window visit to a care home should be possible where a resident is not fit to go outside for a visit. You will still be asked to wear a face mask.

Will my relative/friend still remember me after all this time?

For many people the worry of a relative who has dementia no longer recognising you can be overwhelming. But it is important to stress that despite the time spent apart many people living with dementia will remember their relatives. However, some people may struggle at first.

If your relative doesn’t recognise you straight away, try not to worry and give them time to remember. It may take more than the initial meeting for those memories to be reconnected.

Also, you might need to:

- re-introduce yourself and remind them of the relationship between the two of you
- talk about the distant past first rather than the recent months
• consider taking with you an easily wipe-able object that you can give to your relative with dementia which will remind them of the connection the two of you have.

If, despite all of your attempts your relative doesn’t recognise you, remember that they will still benefit from seeing you, hearing your voice and enjoying your company even if they are not sure who you are.

If your relative/friend wants to walk around with you

It is possible that your relative will want to walk with you. It is okay to do this provided you maintain a physical distance of 2 metres wherever possible.

If your family member’s/friend’s health has deteriorated since you last saw them

It is possible that your relative’s health may have changed. All of us have been affected by the lockdown and this is equally true of residents living in a care home.

For some people there will have been a cognitive decline. These changes in a person’s brain are part of their health journey which continue despite the extraordinary times we are all going through.

If your relative’s dementia has worsened, you may need to adopt different approaches and communication techniques. Your relative may need longer to respond or need more help to do things. But maintaining that relationship is just as important now as it was before the pandemic.

If you don’t feel able to visit

Feeling nervous or anxious about seeing your relative face to face again is a normal response to recent events. Only visit your relative when you feel able to do so and when they agree, as they may also be worried about you coming into the home for your own health.
It is perfectly normal to feel anxious about returning to a place that may have been through such difficult times. The care home itself may have changed significantly since your last visit. Seeing staff in PPE may be a reminder of the impact of COVID-19 on the home. It is likely that over the time you have visited your relative, you have become close to other residents. If these residents have died then it is likely to have an emotional impact on you.

Staff at the home will continue to care for your relative and they will not judge your decision not to visit in person. Alternatives include use of video calls, recorded messages and telephone calls.

**When you leave**

This will be a difficult moment for both you and your relative. Start preparing 10 minutes before you actually have to leave. Agree, in advance, a time with the Home Manager when you can visit again so you can let your loved one know when to expect you. You could write this down and ask the staff to leave in a place for your relative to refer to. Arranging the date and time of the next visit will create a focus for your relative and you. It will also help to prepare you for ending the visit by preparing for the next one.

At all times our staff are here to help you and our residents; please do not be afraid to speak to staff about your loved one or things that are worrying you. They will continue to support your relative after the visit ends.
Acknowledgements

This leaflet was developed by members of the Care Homes Clinical and Professional Advisory Group, a multidisciplinary group which has been established to provide advice and guidance for care homes in Scotland during the pandemic. It was adapted from the Methodist Homes (MHA) COVID-19 visiting guidelines.

The SAFE HOMES acronym was developed by members of the Care Homes Clinical and Professional Advisory group, also with help and input from family members of care home residents. We would like to thank all for their support.