

Covid-19 home visiting policy

Introduction

This policy revises the arrangements for visiting to care homes during the Covid-19 emergency in line with the Government and public health guidance issued on 4th March 2021.

Vida Healthcare recognises that visiting is a central part of care home life and fully supports all guidance issued by Government in respect to reintroduction of visitors to the care homes.

The care home continues to apply its infection control measures fully in line with this latest Government and public health latest guidance in recognition of the fact that because care home residents are amongst the most at risk by virtue of their age and frailty to being seriously and possibly fatally ill if they are infected by the virus.

It is not a condition of visiting 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 when invited to do so under the national programme.

The organisation is also committed to making the visiting policy available and well communicated to its residents and families, so that they understand fully the reasons for any restrictions and arrangements and changes that might need to be made in line with local and national developments regarding Covid-19.

Definitions

1. The care home uses the same definition of 'visitor' as in its main policy, i.e. someone who does not live or normally work on the premises as a paid staff member.
For the purposes of this policy visitors include people who:
2. Visit residents on a personal or social basis regularly or occasionally, eg relatives, friends and others who come to see an individual resident.
3. Provide professional services to residents such as GPs, community nurses, pharmacists, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, ministers of religion, social workers, advocates, hairdressers, opticians, etc.
4. Deliver, provide or supply goods and services that have been bought or commissioned by the home, staff or residents, including repairs and maintenance.
5. Come to the home to see staff members for any reason.
6. Visit the home on a professional or business basis, eg external managers, inspectors and other personnel from the employing organisation or similar who may not be coming specifically to see individual residents, but who may have some contact with them depending on the nature and purpose of their visit.

This policy applies mainly to relatives and friends of residents and others who might need to have direct contact with residents. With other visitors, the home will continue to apply all required infection control measures, including health and safety risk assessments. In these ways the home is committed to minimising and mitigating the risks of infection into, through and from the home.

Current policy and arrangements

Each care home is unique in its physical layout, surrounding environment and layout. Residents vary in their needs, health and current wellbeing. Care home managers are best placed to decide how their care home is best placed to enable visiting within the following guidelines;

1. Single named visitor

Indoor visiting will be permitted from a single named visitor nominated by every care home resident who can visit regularly. These visitors need to take LFD tests before every visit, minimise physical contact, use PPE and follow all IPC measures. Please refer to care home specific guidelines in respect site specific IPC measures and also in respect to frequency and length of visits. Wherever possible the same person must remain as the nominated visitor. The home manager will be responsible for taking a pragmatic approach to any requested changes in this respect. In addition, every nominated visitor will be required to enter into a Visiting Partnership Agreement and adhere to all specified terms. Failure to adhere to the terms of this agreement exposes the residents to unnecessary risk. The company reserves the right to withdraw single named visitor status from any person who breaches the agreement.

2. Essential care giver

Residents with the highest care needs will also be able to nominate an essential care giver in addition to the named visitor where close contact personal care from a loved one is critical for the resident's immediate health and wellbeing. The essential care giver is able to visit **even during an outbreak**.

Essential care givers will only be appointed in exceptional circumstances. The essential care givers will be treated as an extension of the care home staff in all respects including IPC measures and Covid 19 testing protocols. Please note that not all residents will qualify to nominate an essential caregiver. A specialist assessment will need to be made in each case to establish whether a resident qualifies to appoint this person. A person's status in respect to whether they qualify for an essential care giver will be reviewed regularly and dynamically in response to their changing needs.

There is one essential qualifying criterion which must be met in all cases. Essential care giver status can only be granted where a resident's care plan states that they only require the assistance of one person in respect to receiving personal care. In addition, essential care givers may not take part in moving and positioning care due

to health and safety regulations. This would breach the two-metre social distancing rule. By signing the visiting partnership agreement, essential visitors agree that Vida Healthcare Limited cannot be held responsible for any injuries, illnesses or damages which occur as part of delivering care to their loved one on the premises.

3. Outdoor, window and pod visits

Outdoor, window and pod visits will continue, allowing residents to see more people than just their nominated or essential visitors. This is largely the same as the previous iterations of the visiting guidance but will now allow two visitors maximum to visit at any one time. Appropriate PPE must be used throughout the visit.

4. Exceptional circumstances

Visits in exceptional circumstances such as end of life should always be supported and enabled. Families and residents should be supported to plan end of life visiting carefully, with the assumption that visiting will be enabled to happen not just towards the very end of life, and that discussions will take place with the family in good time.

Local circumstances

Subject to local circumstances, visiting arrangements will have to be adjusted to meet any changes advised by national and regional authorities. These changes may include the circumstances of the care home in terms of, for example, its location, resident needs, current staffing situation and its experiences with the Covid-19 outbreak. They may also include the local circumstances of the Covid-19 epidemic, including past and current incidence and transmission risks.

Any arrangements made by the home will apply only when safe to do so, with the approval of the local Public Health authority and on the basis of what Government guidance refers to as 'dynamic risk assessment'.

This has enabled the home to take its decisions on visiting by balancing the benefits to its residents (and reducing harm because of lack of visits) against the risks of increasing Covid-19 infections and their consequences to a vulnerable group of people.

The home recognises that decisions to allow visiting and under what circumstances will be made in line with local intelligence from testing on the community and of residents and staff, transmission risks in the local community and other information provided by the home, for example, through its Capacity Tracker updating.

Visiting schedules

Under the present circumstances the home recognises that all visits will have to be pre-booked and with limited availability some order of priority might need to be established. Each resident will have a visiting plan, which will set out the arrangements for that individual together with an agreement outlining people's responsibilities for the safe and successful conduct of the arranged visits.

All visitors will be asked to provide separately, using the slips or electronic tools available, their contact details in addition to the usual signing of the visitors' book, which is required on other grounds, in line with the Government's test and trace guidance. This information will be held for 21 days before being destroyed in line with data protection laws.

Mental capacity

In making these arrangements the care home will observe the rights of residents who may lack the relevant mental capacity needed to make particular decisions about their needs for visits and visiting plans. It will make all such arrangements in line with individual needs by following best interests' decision — making as set out in the mental capacity laws, and where appropriate in consultation with their advocates or those with power of attorney.

Visiting partnership agreement

1. Single named visitor

When visiting one of our care homes as an agreed nominated visitor we will ask you to review, agree and sign an agreement covering the following areas:

Testing

Consent to take part in all necessary testing procedures prior to being admitted for the visit. If a visitor tests positive following a LFD test, they must immediately leave the premises to go home and self-isolate, avoiding public transport wherever possible. They must then follow government guidance in respect to isolation. The care home will then provide access to a PCR test which must be sent for analysis as per local arrangements. If the confirmatory PCR returns as positive, the whole household must follow relevant government isolation guidelines.

*Please note that all LFD tests must be done in the care home and may not be taken off premises.

Visitors who have recently tested positive for Covid-19 should not routinely be retested within 90 days unless they present with new symptoms. The care home will require evidence of their positive PCR test result as proof of testing exception.

PPE

Agreement to comply with all specified PPE and infection control rules and procedures.

Movement restrictions

Agreement to restrict movements within the care home to the specified agreed place of the visit.

Physical contact

Consent to minimise physical contact with your loved one. Visitors and residents may wish to hold hands, but should bear in mind that any contact

increases the risk of contact. There should be no close physical contact such as hugging because of the risk of infection. Kissing is not permitted as in addition to the above risk, this would require removal of mandatory face coverings.

Food and drink

Nominated visitors should not bring food or drink into the care home for personal consumption.

Personal items/belongings

Visitors will not be allowed to bring in shopping bags or other non-essential items other than for example a small handbag which is suitable for surface disinfection. Please also note that the care home will not provide storage facilities for such items and they may not be brought inside the premises.

Ventilation

During a visit, you consent to ensure that the room remains well ventilated. i.e where a window is open you must not shut it.

Social distancing

Visitors must agree to maintain strict social distancing from all staff and residents, at all times observing the two-metre rule.

Prebooking

Visitors will be asked to comply with all local prebooking systems. Adhoc or unannounced visits will not be permitted.

2. Agreed essential visitors

In addition to all points listed above, agreed essential visitors will also be required to comply with the following regulations:

PPE

Essential care givers will be required to undertake specialist training in respect to correct use of and donning/doffing of all required items of PPE and also in the correct frequency of PPE changes. The care home will support the visitor by undertaking a number of observations until such time as the visitor is deemed to be competent and confident in the required procedure.

Where a resident is believed to have Covid-19 symptoms or is coughing, and the essential visitor will be within two metres of them, additional PPE must be used as specified and may include goggles and/or visors.

Additional visitors

If the resident has an essential care giver, the visitor will be permitted to sit with the resident whilst a window visit takes place or will be allowed to accompany the resident to the pod.

Policy in the event of an outbreak

Family and friends should be advised that if there is a declared outbreak in a care home then visiting will need to be restricted only to exceptional circumstances such as end of life and essential care giver status.

If there is a restriction to visitors in place, alternative ways of communicating between residents and their families and friends should be offered. The care home should also provide regular updates to residents' loved ones on their mental and physical health, how they are coping and identify any additional ways they might be better supported, including any cultural or religious needs.

Review

The home will update this visiting policy in the light of further developments and the easing of restrictions as the risk decrease. It will, however, return to a tightening- up if there are further cases of Covid-19 in the home or evidence of increased risk from community transmission that has been identified by local Public Health.