

# Guidance for Visitors to Care Homes

## Background

On 5 November 2020 the Government set out new guidance for visitors in care homes. This document provides details of the arrangements for Avante Care & Support Care Homes, and these have been developed to meet the requirements of the new government guidance and to consider any supplementary recommendations from the local authorities in which we work.

We recognise how difficult it has been for relatives to see their loved ones since the initial lockdown in March, and while we have been able to provide outside visiting, we appreciate this has not always been ideal; particularly as the colder weather increases.

While there continues to be restrictions as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, the underlying principle of visiting arrangements is to ensure we balance the benefits to residents against the risk of visitors introducing infection into the care home, or spreading infection from the care home to the community.

## Visiting Policy

In addition to the underlying principle to allow visitors to a care home, the decision is based on a risk assessment which considers a number of key factors. These include:

- the ability of the care home to put in place practical measures to mitigate any risks arising from visits
- the health and wellbeing risks arising from the needs of the residents in that setting, for example people living with dementia
- advice from health professionals, for example the PHE local Health Protection Team, the Infection Prevention and Control Lead from the responsible CCG
- the precautions that will be taken to prevent infection during visits (including PPE use and hand washing) and ensure these are communicated in a clear and accessible way

- the likely practical effectiveness of social distancing measures between the visitor and the residents
- where the healthcare needs of the individual cannot be met by socially distant visits, whether there are sufficient infection-control measures in place to protect the residents, staff and visitors, to allow the visit to take place

All of the above must be considered before any visits are put in place.

## Facilitating Visits

Following the key policy details being considered and confirmed, there are other practical elements which have to be considered before the visits take place. These include:

- The results from weekly testing of staff and monthly testing of residents. This data will enable the risk assessment to be well informed and up to date.
- Evidence of outbreaks and recovery from outbreaks should also be considered (a recovered outbreak is defined as 28 days or more since the last suspected or confirmed case reported)
- The readiness of the care home to respond quickly when there is a confirmed or suspected COVID-19 case within the care home, to immediately return to essential visits only (for example, end of life), with no exceptions.

## The arrangements for the visit itself

The arrangements for the visits will take account of each care home's layout, whether the visit is inside or outside and how the area is accessed. While such considerations mean that each care home will have differing arrangements there are conditions which will apply to all care homes. In all cases:

- Visitor numbers should be limited to a single constant visitor, with an absolute maximum of 2 constant visitors per resident – where two named visitors are agreed for a resident this still means only one visitor at a time. This is in order to limit the overall number of visitors to the care home
- Visitors must only visit at the agreed time which must be booked in advance. All visits must finish by agreed time in order for the area to be cleaned, before subsequent visits take place
- Appropriate PPE must be used throughout the visit, and around the care home building and grounds
- Social distancing (between visitors and residents, staff, and visitors from other households) must be maintained at all times – during the visit, and around the care home building and grounds
- Stringent and high-quality infection prevention and control practice must be maintained throughout the visit and through the wider care home environment.



- there will be an arrangement to enable booking/appointments for visitors - ad hoc visits will not be permitted
- visiting spaces must be used by only one resident and visiting party at a time, and between visits there must be appropriate cleaning and an appropriate time interval
- the visitor and resident must remain at least 2 metres apart at all times

## Expectations of Visitors

- All visitors will be asked a series of questions to screen for potential Covid-19 or any other respiratory infection; no one who is currently experiencing, or first experienced, coronavirus symptoms in the last 10 days, will be allowed to enter the premises, nor anyone who is a household contact of a case or who has been advised to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace.
- Visitors must follow any guidance, procedures or protocols put in place by the care home and a copy of the “Visitors to Care Homes” will be available for all visitors on arrival
- Visitors must discuss with staff, any items they wish to bring with them on their visit, such as a gift. It will need to be something that can be easily cleaned by the care home to prevent cross contamination. For example, a box of chocolates that could be sanitised with wipes
- Visitors will be provided facilities to wash their hands for 20 seconds or use hand sanitiser on entering and leaving the home, and to catch coughs and sneezes in tissues and clean their hands after disposal of the tissues
- Visitors must ensure appropriate PPE is always worn and used correctly - which in this situation is an appropriate form of protective face covering (this may include a surgical face mask where specific care needs align to close contact care) and good hand hygiene for all visitors. PPE will be provided by the care home.
- Consideration will be given to the availability of additional protective clothing (for example, apron and gloves) social distancing is difficult to maintain.

The home will provide the visitors with the details of when and where the visit will take place. The recommendation is to achieve, where possible, outside visiting spaces and these may take the form of:

- A window visit
- An outside structure, e.g. log cabin, “visiting pod”

Where outside visiting is not possible, visits inside the care homes will have to meet the following requirements:



- A dedicated room/area which can be entered directly from outside wherever possible or,
- where there is a single access point to the space, the resident and visitor enter the space at different times to ensure that safe distancing and seating
- a substantial screen between the resident and visitor to reduce the risk of transmission (this will also apply to any outside structure which is enclosed)
- there must be good ventilation for spaces used (for example, including keeping doors and windows open where safe to do so and/or using ventilation systems if these circulate fresh air)

Whether the location is inside or outside the visiting space must only be used by only one resident and visiting party at a time, and is subject to regular enhanced cleaning between each visit.

Each care home supports the NHS Test and Trace system and will keep a record (including address and phone number) of current and previous residents, staff and visitors, as well as keeping track of visitor numbers and staff.

### **Reasons for visits not taking place**

In the event of an outbreak in a care home, the home should rapidly move to stop visiting (except in exceptional circumstances such as end of life) to protect vulnerable residents, staff and visitors.

Each local authority will have local policy and outbreak management arrangements, which the care home will have to follow. Restrictions may continue the care home receive confirmation that the outbreak has been brought under control and then recovered – normally 28 days. At this point visiting may be restarted but with the usual infection prevention and control measures and any enhancements required arising from the most recent outbreak.

If there is a restriction to visitors in place, alternative ways of communicating between residents and their families and friends will be discussed and offered. The care home will 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 of visiting arrangements**

The above details will be revised in light of any changing government guidance.

Visitors are asked to contact the Home Manager if there are any queries to the arrangements in place, or if there is any aspect of the visiting arrangements which they believe will make it difficult to comply with before any visit is made.

